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The Power of the Consumer



ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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Last month in this very letter, I told you how you the gamer had the power, and that console manufacturers needed to please us with their next systems, not the other way around. The echo of rage against Microsoft's "always-on" and used games policies were certainly loud after Xbox One's May reveal, but once Sony took the stage at this year's E3 and laid down the gauntlet on requirements for Internet connections and how they were pushing player choice, the rage against Microsoft and its policies reached epic proportions.

Then something amazing happened: Microsoft actually listened. Just a short week after E3's last day, Microsoft issued a statement that explained how it would now support physical copies, much as it does today, but also support users who want to make the jump to full digital (for all the details check out pg. 14).

Of course, the always-on Internet connection will still be required for many games, but games that don't solely rely on cloud servers or interactions via the Internet can still be played in offline mode.

Gamers won this round, but in my opinion so did the hardware manufacturers, game publishers, and game developers. The way to an all-digital future for game consoles isn't through enforcement of policy, but rather by giving gamers the option to play the way they want to play, combined with providing developers the tools and publishers the power to create enticing new ways to play and pay for games.

Now that the battle of policy and choice is over, we can move on to the most important aspect of every console: the games. Right now, the options to gamers are numerous. The current generation of consoles has an impressive array of games on the horizon like Batman: Arkham Origins and Grand Theft Auto V. For gamers who make the jump to the new hardware, I feel I can safely say this is the most impressive batch of first-generation software I have ever seen, and it is only going to get better.

Enjoy the Hot 50.

Cheers,



» 36

E3 Hot 50

After a grueling week of playing the best games of the future, getting our hands on the next generation of consoles, and hanging out with our favorite game developers, it's time to share the results of our torturous week. We let you know our top 50 favorite games from this year's E3.



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The Trailers of E3 2013



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» 6 Feedback

The next generation of consoles is just on the horizon, and readers are already picking sides. This month we hear your thoughts on which horse to back, how consoles should allow modding, and what controllers are better than all the rest.

» 12 Connect

E3 2013 is over and we're looking back on all of the major press conferences and giving them grades. We also round up all the games that were ineligible for our top 50 list because they were only shown in trailer form.

» 36 Previews

It may not be surprising to learn that we have a lot of previews this month. We saw a lot of games at E3. Some are just around the corner, and some are a few years out. Even with looks at 50 different upcoming games, we still didn't cover everything at the show. We're giving you the best of the best.

» 88 Reviews

This month, reviews cover a wide swath of genres. We have a review for the *The Last of Us*, and on the opposite end of the spectrum we review High Moon Studios' *Deadpool*. We also spent time with *NCAA Football 14*, and highlight two excellent independent titles, *The Swapper* and *Gunpoint*.

» 100 Game Over

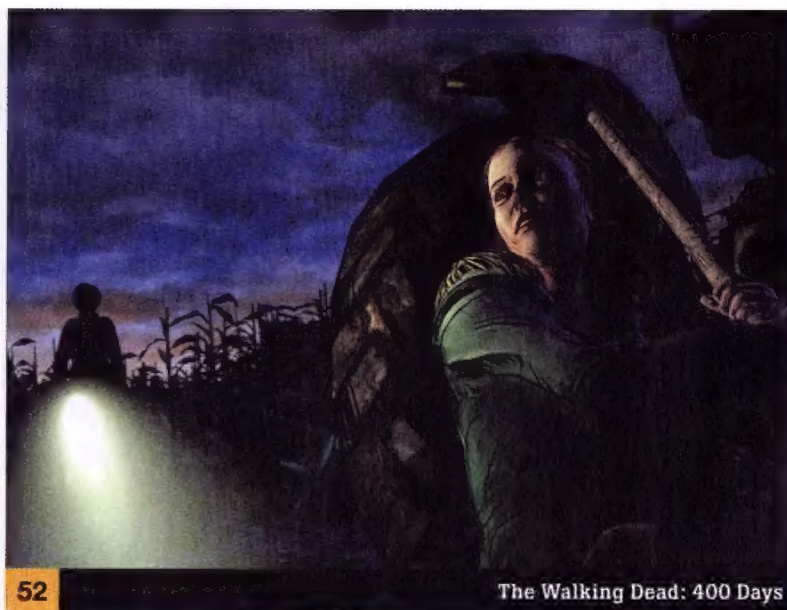
A lot of publishers make hyperbolic statements about the future of gaming at every E3. We selected some of our favorite quotes and slogans and want to see if you can figure out who said it and when.



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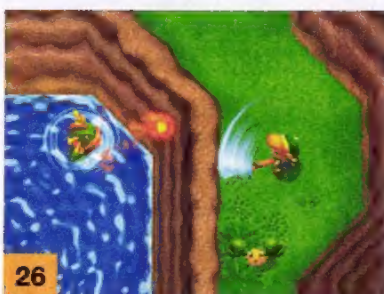


30 DICE's Karl Magnus Troedsson



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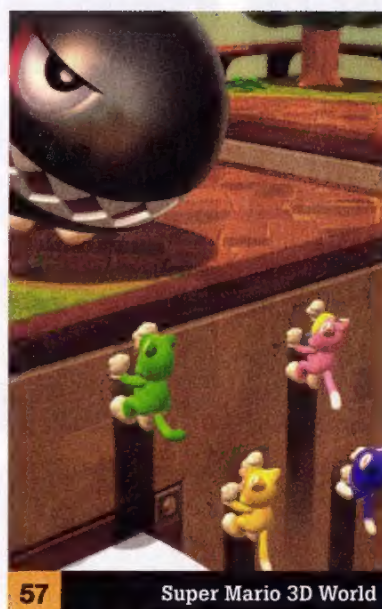
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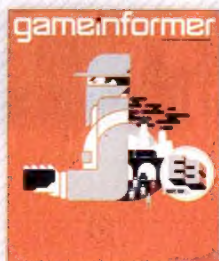


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Super Mario 3D World



Destiny
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Watch Dogs
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The Legend of Zelda:
A Link Between Worlds
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Need for Speed Rivals
(p. 51)



Plants vs. Zombies:
Garden Warfare
(p. 56)

Our E3 Hot 50 Covers

E3 is about the games first and foremost, and we decided that the best way to celebrate the show this year was to put GI designers Laleh Azarshin Tobin and Samm Langer's takes on some of the hottest games at the convention on the cover. Each of the five covers represents a unique artistic vision that we feel represents one of the titles that had a top-tier showing at E3, though as you'll soon see, they don't correlate directly with our top five from the show or any other formal ranking. We hope you like them as much as we do.

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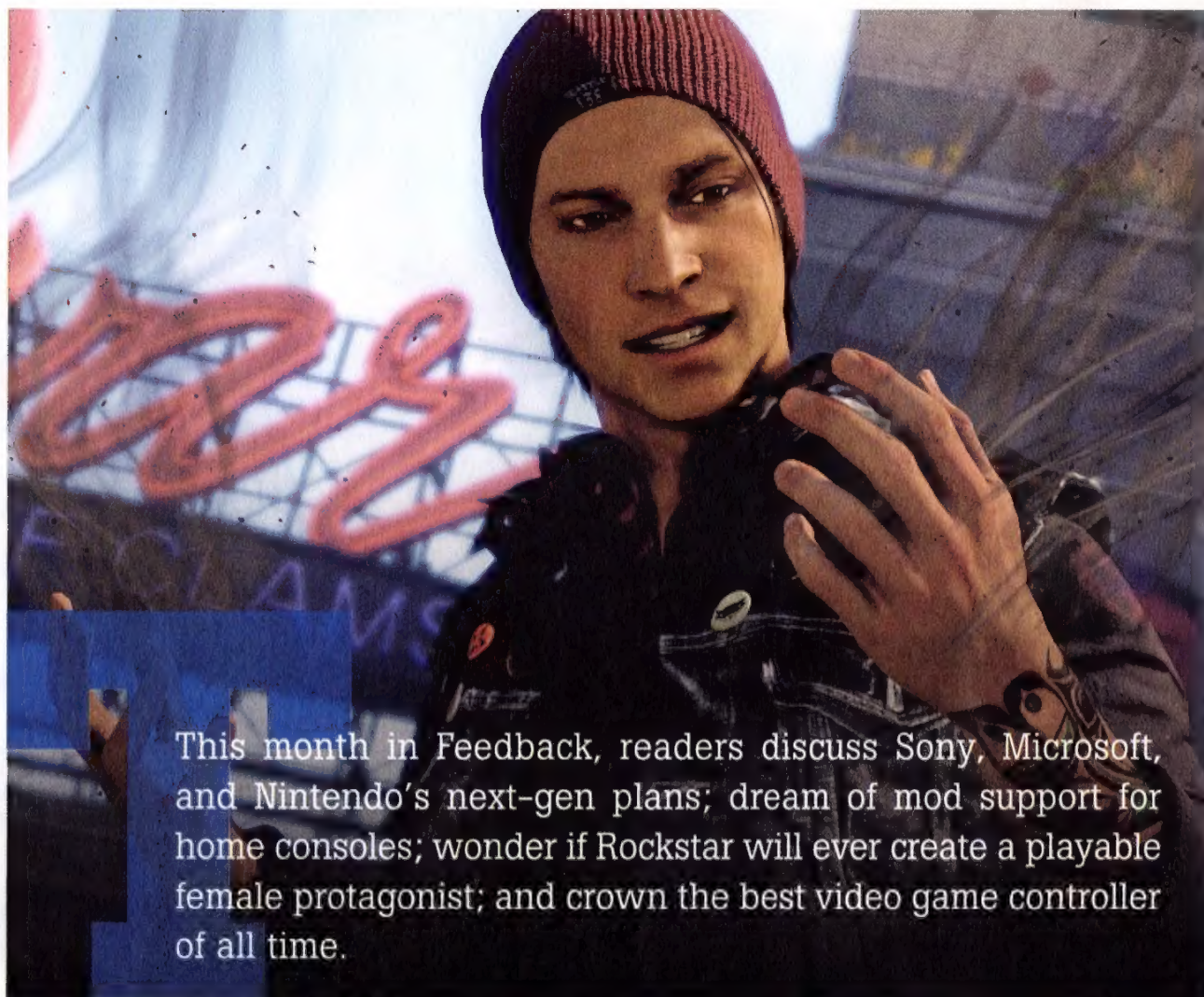


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This month in Feedback, readers discuss Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo's next-gen plans; dream of mod support for home consoles; wonder if Rockstar will ever create a playable female protagonist; and crown the best video game controller of all time.

Infatuated with Infamous

I want to thank you for the article on Infamous Second Son. I am a humongous fan of the series, and I had a little explosion in my heart when I saw the cover. The article got me so pumped for the latest installment. Every piece of information that Sucker Punch withholds from us causes me to wonder about the possibilities (magnetic conduit powers, anyone?). I even looked up all the videos I could find on conduit history and interviews with the developer just to find out more.

Bradley Wood
via email

When I first heard there was going to be another game in the Infamous series, I was filled with elation. Then my friends told me it was only on PlayStation 4. A bit worried, I looked up the game when I got home, and found out they were right. I can understand that Sony needs some good titles to start the next generation of consoles, but I still wish that they would eventually release it for PlayStation 3, a system that I will probably have for at least two or three more years before I can get the PS4. Given this, I am sad to admit that Infamous Second Son has made me more frustrated and upset than any game I have ever wanted or played.

Jeremy Schwingbeck
via email

We understand your frustration, Jeremy, but by creating Second Son solely for the PS4, Sucker Punch can take full advantage of the new system's power without limiting its design to accommodate older, weaker hardware. That probably doesn't provide you with much comfort, but on the bright side plenty of third-party games will be coming to both generations of consoles for the foreseeable future. As for the rest of the Infamous fans: Be sure to check out all of our bonus coverage at gameinformer.com/infamous.

Mod Squad

There has been something I've wanted for a while on consoles but haven't seen, and that is community-based modding. I'm not talking about aimbots and god modes, but mods that add content to single-player games. Some people can't afford high-end PCs that run games like Skyrim and Fallout, so why should mods be so limited to PC? I hope that PS4 and Xbox One feature a community hub like Steam Workshop that allows mods to be created on a computer and transferred to said hub. I know the likelihood of that is slim, but I am tired of feeling left out because I can't afford a state-of-the-art gaming rig.

Noah Footer
via email

While a decent gaming PC won't cost you that much more than a next-gen console, your desire for game mods is still understandable. Implementing mod support on home consoles presents a number of technical problems and security concerns for developers. That said, devising tools that allow players to make and share content on consoles isn't easy either, and developers like Media Molecule and United Front Games pulled it off this generation. Keeping your expectations in check is smart, but we wouldn't give up hope of seeing more modding opportunities in next-gen gaming.



Contact Us

feedback@gameinformer.com

Regulators, Mount Up

I'm going to put this simply: Games need to be regulated. There must be some kind of quality assurance, like in practically everything else we buy. At this point in my gaming life, I have a pile of games that are unplayable and unbeatable because of broken controls or unbalanced difficulty. Like a book or movie or any other entertainment product that you cannot complete, it's a rip-off! I am tired of

being ripped off when all I'm trying to do is buy entertainment and be entertained. Is that too much to ask?

Ryan Balogh
via email

Wanting quality entertainment for your money isn't too much to ask for, but instituting some kind of new regulatory body in hopes of guaranteeing said quality is.



The Gender Gap

How is it that Rockstar gets a free pass on their gender problems? Every game they put out has a male protagonist. That could be excused in the past as every game only had one option. However, GTA V has three main characters, all of whom have a Y chromosome. I find that terribly disappointing. Even the soulless money factory that is *The Fast & the Furious* manages to include badass women in the mix of crime and car chases, yet Rockstar goes full dude and you don't even throw it a scolding look. I guess games still are a boys club.

Timothy Flammger
Buffalo, NY

You're not the only one who questioned the lack of a playable female character when GTA V was announced, but we're willing to give Rockstar the benefit of the doubt. The developer's games have consistently featured masterful storytelling; five of Rockstar's characters made our 30 Characters Who Defined a Decade list (issue 212), including Red Dead Redemption's Bonnie MacFarlane. Condemning the developer for not including a female protagonist in a narrative we still know very little about would be a mistake.

Developers and publishers already subject their games to extensive playtesting and quality assurance before release. For some games it's not enough, but trying to independently regulate something as subjective as difficulty balance is just a bad idea. Unless someone wants to pay us to do it – then it just might work.

Xbox 180

I was saddened when I read the news that Microsoft was changing its always-online policy. Don't get me wrong; I wasn't a fan of their original policies, but deep down I was hoping that with time Microsoft would reveal some really awesome reasons behind these policies – reasons that would ultimately benefit the gamer. Now, however, I'm worried that Microsoft's change will affect the new things they brought to the table as well; I'm afraid this was a step backwards.

Anthony Paluso
via email

I think Microsoft was planning to change its always-online DRM plan the whole time. I think they just wanted to see if gamers were dumb enough to accept it. Once the backlash occurred, they decided to "change" their approach in order to give us the impression that they've been listening to what gamers want. There is no way that after all these years of development the Xbox One is going to be completely overhauled to perform in an entirely different way than it was originally planned. With only five months until release, Microsoft is fully prepared to scrap the ideas they've been working on for years and simply "change" it? I don't buy it.

Tony Bovee
via email

Microsoft's decision to reverse its always-online and used game policies is certainly surprising, but no company would willfully orchestrate the PR nightmare Microsoft suffered at E3, or announce a host of features for its next-gen console only to cancel them a month later. This isn't Microsoft executing some nefarious master plan – Microsoft is abandoning its master plan in order to stay competitive with Sony and avoid consumer backlash. Learn more about Microsoft's rocky E3 on page 14.

Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions:

"I am puzzled as to the controversy over an always-online console. How do we know the PS3 and Xbox 360 aren't always-online right now?"

By turning off your Internet connection.

"What is your favorite gaming location: couch, bed, floor, etc. and why?"

Couch, because we're not animals.

"Would you kindly reveal everything you know about Half-Life 3?"

Nice try, Andrew Ryan.

It's Official!

Star Trek fans really didn't appreciate us referring to the series as the "RC Cola of Star Wars."

Worst News Tip of the Month:

"They really need to make an app for phone devices."

Question of the Month:

What is the most important factor when choosing which next-gen system to buy?

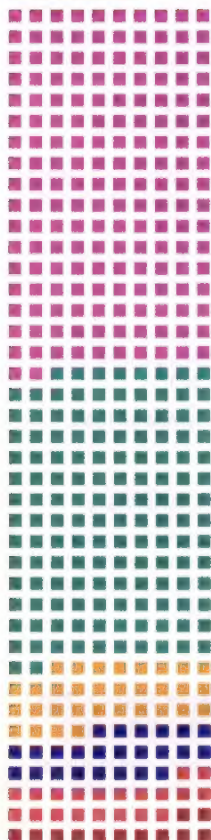


(Left) Ben Reeves, Dan, and Ben Hanson met with Sony's Aram Jabbari (front) and members of Sucker Punch during our Infamous Second Son cover story. Sadly none of them developed super powers. (Right) Members of the video game industry illuminati descended upon New Orleans for some R&R before E3.

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

GI SPY
continued on page 8

The Best Controller as Decided by Readers:



- 43% Xbox 360
- 35% PlayStation 3
- 8% GameCube
- 6% Nintendo 64
- 5% Wii Remote
- 3% Super Nintendo

In Control

In issue 242, we asked readers what their favorite controller is and why. The Xbox 360 controller beat out the DualShock 3 by a modest margin, though most acknowledged the problems with Microsoft's d-pad. Here are some of the responses.

Xbox 360. It's the perfect size and weight for my average-sized hands. The triggers and joysticks are comfortable, and the center guide button is fantastic. Sadly, the d-pad still sucks.

Joe Monroe

I like the PS3 controller because of the built-in battery and the controller is smaller, so my hands don't get as sweaty. It's also more comfortable for third-person games.

Laura Peterson

This is the easiest question to answer: the GameCube controller. It was different and was designed brilliantly for the human hand. I will never forget the first time I played a demo GameCube in a store before it launched. The second I grabbed the controller I knew I would be buying the system. No controller has even come close to matching it.

Danny Bogue

The Super NES controller, hands down. That controller introduced gamers to what is the core button scheme for every single PlayStation and Xbox controller in existence. The only modifications that were needed by the likes of Sony and Microsoft were additional bumpers, analog sticks, and rumble features. I think it's quite a feat to create a controller with such a user-friendly design that it is still the overall gold-standard template for most controllers over two decades later.

Garth Weaver

Nintendo's Master Plan?

Nintendo is playing it safe. Think about it: In the next seven or eight years, how will Sony and Microsoft market new game consoles to the world after the PS4 and Xbox One? What could they add, if anything? That is it for Sony and Microsoft. Now look at Nintendo. I'd say the Wii U is 20-percent stronger than current-gen consoles. Where does Nintendo go next but up the ladder? So you see, they just wanted to keep people hungry; you can't give cows good feed then think they'll take hay during the winter.

Antone C.
via email

We've heard gamers defend their favorite companies with a lot of dubious justifications over the years, but this one takes the cake. Even if technology did mysteriously stop advancing for the next decade, we still don't know why Sony and Microsoft releasing more-powerful consoles is bad for the gamers who buy them, or why Nintendo fans should be happy with a less powerful console simply because it theoretically makes good business sense for the company. Let this be a lesson, kids: Nothing good ever comes from blind fanaticism.

Give Us a Hand

Your Top 10 Disembodied Hands list (issue 242) is missing a crucial one: Freddy Krueger's glove from the NES game, A Nightmare on Elm Street. Granted, it's not that great of a game, but the first boss is Freddy's glove! That should handily beat everything else on the list, because let's face it: Freddy Krueger is awesome.

David
via email

David wasn't the only hand lover to write us about a missing manus from our Top 10 list. The floating hands of Star Fox's Andross, zombie hands from Call of Duty, and the Fist of Grudge from Catherine were all highlighted by other disgruntled readers, proving once and for all that there is nothing gamers won't argue about.

(Left) Double Fine's Tim Schafer and Greg Rice invited Tim to their studio to check out Broken Age.

(Right) 2 Player Productions' Paul Owens and Asif Siddiky also tried to teach Tim how to play the drums. It didn't go well.



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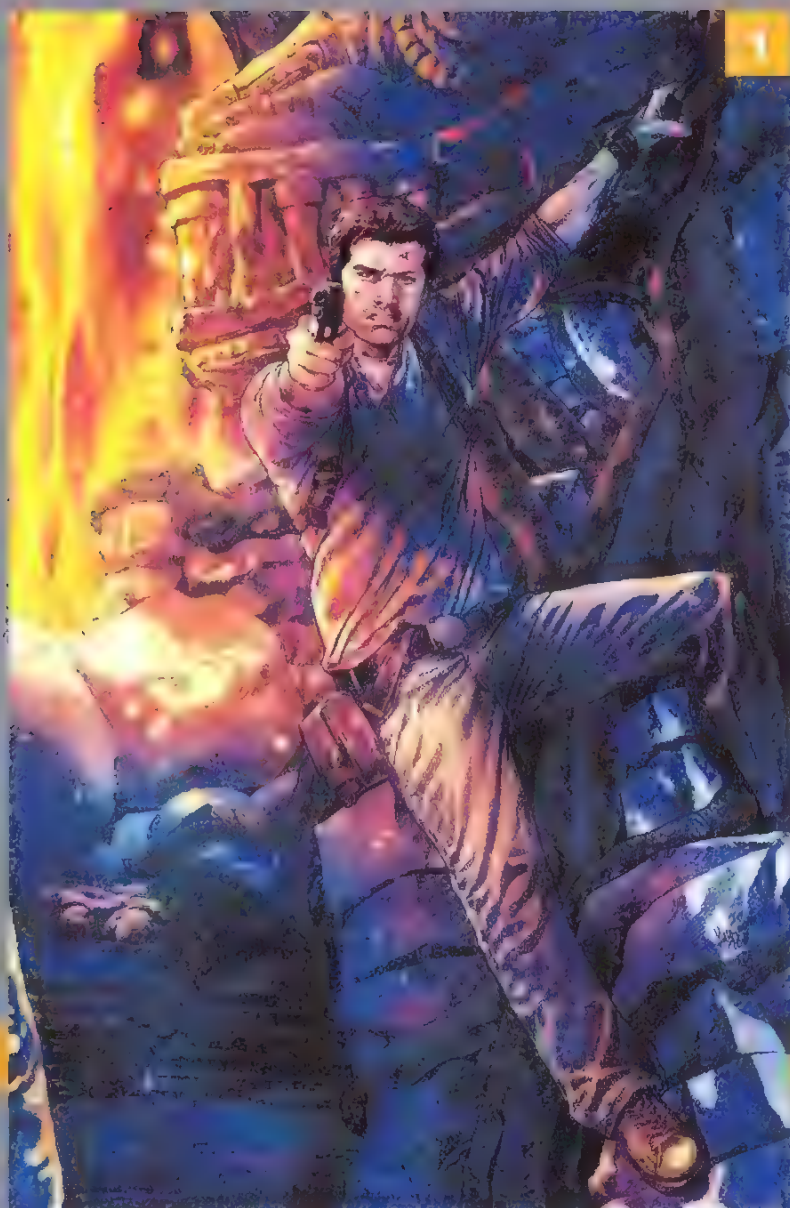


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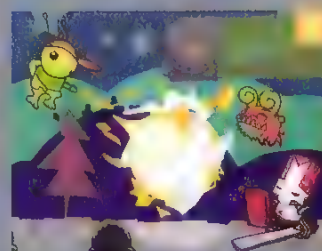


1. Remember Me
A character with long, flowing white hair and a purple top, standing in front of a large, stylized orange and black circular logo. The text "REMEMBER ME" is visible in the background.

2. Remember Me
A character with long, flowing white hair and a purple top, standing in front of a large, stylized orange and black circular logo. The text "REMEMBER ME" is visible in the background.

3. Remember Me
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4. Remember Me
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(Left) Jason and Tim invited chiptune band Anamanaguchi over to the office to chat about video games and music. Listen to the podcast on gameinformer.com.
(Right) Meet Game Informer's newest interns: Brian Albert, Liz Lanier, and Matt Akers.





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THE FUTURE

- microsoft report card
- sony report card
- nintendo report card
- e3 console alternatives
- the trailers of e3
- impulse: the downloadable & independent games of e3
- massive: dust 514
- interview: dice's karl-magnus troedsson





5

2013

After two straight years of hoping to hear about next-generation consoles from Sony and Microsoft, the two finally delivered. The PlayStation 4 and Xbox One took center stage at E3 2013, and both had very different outcomes. Having detailed its entertainment strategy in late May, Microsoft turned its attention to games, showcasing promising exclusives like *Dead Rising 3*, *Forza Motorsport 5*, *Quantum Break*, and the show-stopping Xbox One/Xbox 360/PC title *Titanfall*.

Sony revealed its parallelogram-shaped hardware and a strong lineup of indie games, but it received the most uproarious applause of the show by declaring the PS4 supports used games, allows you to lend your physical copies to friends, and doesn't require an always-online

connection, three talking points plaguing the Microsoft message. The press conference crowd reacted with a level of fervor we haven't seen in years. Microsoft subsequently abandoned its announced used-game and DRM policies, marking a dramatic turnaround in the company's strategy after a week of upset gamers voicing their concerns all across the Internet.

With the console pitches out of the way on Monday, the rest of the week focused on impressive next-generation games like *Watch Dogs*, *Battlefield 4*, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, *Destiny*, and *The Division*. Yes, mobile and free-to-play games are raking in money hand over fist. But if these games are any indication, console gaming is also poised for healthy growth, and we couldn't be happier about it. Read on to get a comprehensive recap of all the news that made headlines during this year's show.



If Microsoft's E3 had started and ended with its press conference, the company would be in great shape for the November launch of the Xbox One. After being criticized for focusing too much on television and other non-gaming media during its console reveal in May, the company rebounded with a strong showing of console exclusives and third-party support – exactly the kind of core games E3 attendees wanted to see.

MICROSOFT REVERSES COURSE IN THE FACE OF CONSUMER BACKLASH

Microsoft's biggest achievement was undoubtedly shoring up console exclusivity for Titanfall, which is also coming to Xbox 360 and PC; Respawn's multiplayer-focused shooter wowed fans all week and won numerous game of the show awards, including our own.

Capcom also revealed Dead Rising 3 as a Microsoft-published Xbox One exclusive, complete with a live demo featuring chaotic open-world action not possible on current-gen systems. Other exclusives like Ryse: Son of Rome, Forza 5, Killer Instinct, and Project Spark evoked mixed reactions on the show floor, but still hold promise, as do a number of teased projects shown only in videos. These include Remedy Entertainment's Quantum Break, Insomniac Games' Sunset Overdrive, and a new Halo, which Microsoft didn't see fit to name yet. Demos for multiplatform titles Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain, The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt, and Battlefield 4 reassured gamers that Xbox One has all the third-party support one would expect from a next-gen system.

Despite the solid lineup of games, Microsoft's press conference didn't occur in a vacuum, and its software triumphs were offset by a week of bad PR. The problems started on the Thursday before the show, when Microsoft clarified its always-online and trading policies, which were immediately decried by gamers. The confusion and anger spilled over into the show. When Microsoft took the stage Monday morning, the company did nothing to address the growing discontent, and had already canceled most of its post-show interviews. Sony capitalized on its competitor's silence by defining the differences between the two next-gen consoles itself, with a

rigorous and pointed counter that won the company thunderous applause during its own press conference.

Microsoft continued to defend its unpopular policies throughout the week, but only compounded its PR headache. When Microsoft president of interactive entertainment Don Mattrick told Game Trailers' Geoff Keighley that gamers without Internet access should stick with the Xbox 360, it became clear that the company simply had no next-gen solution for offline gamers. Microsoft then released a list of the countries it planned to support at Xbox One's launch, which excluded Japan and Poland, meaning not even online players in those countries could use the console. Marcin Iwinski, co-founder and joint CEO of Poland-based developer CD Projekt RED, expressed surprise and disappointment at the announcement, calling his country's omission "a sad situation."

Fan reaction to the stark contrasts between the PlayStation 4 and the Xbox One were so damning for Microsoft that in the week following E3, the company announced a complete reversal on its used-game and always-online policies. Xbox One no longer requires an Internet connection after a one-time system setup, and consumers can share, trade, and sell their game discs as they please. As a result, playing disc-based games now requires the disc to be in the tray in order to run. Microsoft is also scrapping its family sharing plan, and players can no longer share digital games with friends. As of the time of this writing, it's still unclear if any of Xbox One's other proposed features are affected by the policy changes.

Despite the celebrated policy reversals, Microsoft's new console still has a significant monetary hurdle to overcome. During its E3 press conference, the company revealed that Xbox One costs \$499 in America (£429 and €499 in other territories), \$100 more than the PlayStation 4's asking price. Most analysts attribute the price difference to the packed-in Kinect, but Microsoft showed virtually no software for the peripheral at E3 to convince consumers that the mandatory camera is worth the extra money.

After numerous rumors leading up to E3, Microsoft revealed it is working on a new Killer Instinct. The downloadable title is being developed by Double Helix, and allows gamers to play as returning martial-arts master Jago at no cost and buy other characters individually or as a single, complete package. Fans of the series were predictably excited by the announcement, but it's too early to tell whether the new installment will please the larger fighting-game community.

During its E3 press conference, Microsoft corporate vice president Phil Harrison pledged continued support for indie games before announcing a new port of Minecraft is in development for Xbox One. Aside from a game that has sold more than 20 million copies on other platforms, Microsoft didn't have many indie titles to show, in stark contrast to the vast lineup Sony featured prominently in its booth. While Project Spark seems geared toward letting players create their own game experiences, the lack of other titles and the continued inability for developers to self-publish on Microsoft's platforms leaves a lot of questions surrounding the Xbox One's relevancy in the indie space.



Project Spark

Ryse: Son of Rome



The Xbox One's solid game lineup, featuring the likes of Titanfall and Dead Rising 3, should convince gamers that Microsoft is serious about gaming on the Xbox One. The company's decision to reverse its unpopular policies is undoubtedly a win for gamers, but it's impossible to tell how much damage the company has already inflicted on itself. We admire Microsoft's attempt to right its wayward ship in the wake of consumer backlash, but the company is running out of time to effectively communicate the value of its console to gamers. Mainstream shows like *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* have already lauded the PS4 as a more consumer-friendly console based on Microsoft's previous plans. Even if its policy changes win back fans, there's still the significant price difference between the consoles that Microsoft must justify to consumers.



SONY UNLEASHES A SMACKDOWN IN AN E3 TO REMEMBER



Jack Tretton opened up Sony's E3 press conference by saying the presentation was dedicated to the fans. About an hour later, the president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment of America delivered a point-by-point dismantling of its chief competitor in a display that not only fired up existing Sony loyalists but spawned legions of new ones.

Microsoft spent the weeks leading up to the show revealing, rephrasing, and then remixing its strategy regarding Xbox One and used-game sales, game sharing, and always-online requirements. Meanwhile, Sony kept quiet. The company broke its silence in a series of brutally effective takedowns, starting with the announcement that the PS4 would have no restrictions on used games. The enthusiastic crowd cheered at the news for more than 20 seconds. "Guess that's a good thing," Tretton quipped.

"We believe in the model that people embrace today with PlayStation 3 and continue to demand," he continued. "When a gamer buys a PS4 disc, they have the rights to use that copy of the game. They can trade in the game at retail, sell it to another person, lend it to a friend, or keep it forever." And unlike the Xbox One, he added, the PS4 won't require online authentication to play single-player games.

Those announcements were great by themselves, but they were just a small portion of the overall presentation. After all, what good are those policies if there aren't any games worth lending to friends in the first place? Based on what Sony and its third-party partners showed, the PlayStation 4 is positioning itself as a solid first choice in the upcoming next-gen battle.

Killzone: Shadow Fall, DriveClub, and Knack – all shown at the console's February reveal event – are planned for the console's holiday launch. Sucker Punch's Infamous Second Son is coming somewhere in the first quarter of 2014.

Square Enix teased the long-awaited third entry in the Kingdom Hearts series, as well as Final Fantasy XV (the newly branded name for Final Fantasy Versus XIII). While those titles aren't PS4 exclusives, we learned that Sony's console is the lead platform, with the Xbox One version effectively built as a port.

Ready at Dawn and Sony Santa Monica showed off a trailer for the PS4-exclusive The Order: 1866. The clip shows a reimagining of Victorian-era London, only with unusually advanced technology and supernatural elements.

Bungie conducted an extended live demonstration of its upcoming shooter, Destiny. The game looked

great, and its appearance also carried some heavy symbolic weight. The game is the studio's first post-Halo release, a franchise that is closely associated with the Xbox brand. While Destiny is a multiplatform release, it's significant that the first time we saw it in action was on a Sony stage.

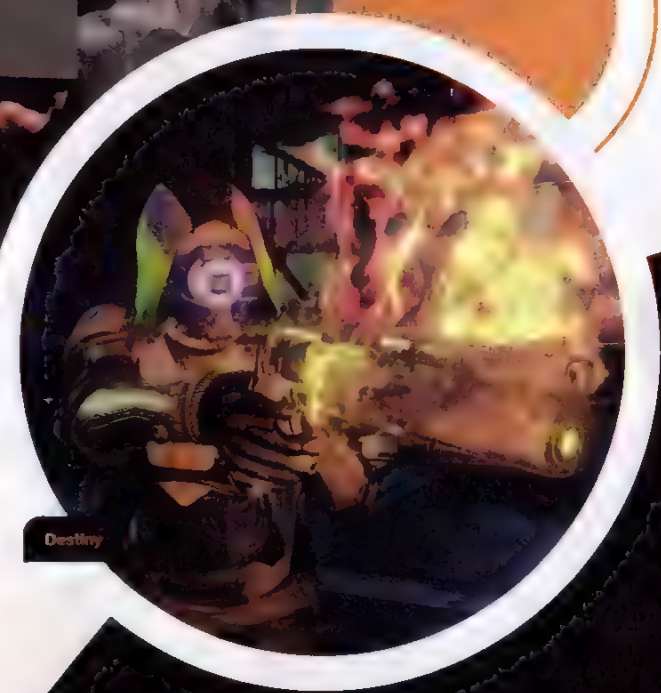
While triple-A games took their share of stage time, Sony's vice president of publisher and developer relations Adam Boyes provided space for indie developers. Smaller studios can choose to self-publish their games on the PlayStation 4, making it a more attractive proposition than the curated approach that Microsoft has and is continuing to use. Sony picked eight indie devs to provide brief looks at their games, which included Octodad: Dadliest Catch, Galak-Z, and Mercenary Kings.

As one last shot across Microsoft's bow, Andrew House, president and group CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment, ended the press conference with the console's price: \$399. This is \$100 cheaper than the Xbox One. 💎

FINAL GRADE

Sony grabbed headlines with its consumer-friendly policies, but that information was sandwiched between hours of exclusive game reveals and live demos. The company's booth presence extended Tretton's promise that this was all for the fans, providing hands-on opportunities with dozens of playable PS3, Vita, and PS4 titles. This strong conference set the tone of this year's show as Sony's E3 to lose.

A



PLAYSTATION PLUS

Players have enjoyed free access to online multiplayer on the PlayStation 3, but that is changing with the introduction of the PS4. Online matches require a PlayStation Plus subscription – either new or existing – which carries a \$50 annual fee. That includes access to the service's automatic game updates, cloud saves, and free game downloads – including a special PlayStation Plus Edition of DriveClub.

Quantic Dreams' David Cage showed off the studio's next-gen tech in a demo called The Dark Sorcerer. The comedic clip used advanced facial technology first shown at the PS4's reveal.

E3 2013

With the Wii U failing to move at retail, many expected Nintendo to make a major statement at E3. Instead, Nintendo had a modest showing that catered to the company's loyal fans and didn't provide much in the way of excitement for gamers that remain unconvinced.

Nintendo opted against its traditional press conference in favor of a worldwide Nintendo Direct video that unveiled the company's big new announcements. It also staged a "Wii U Software Showcase" event in its booth prior to the opening of the first day of E3 for select members of the press (including Game Informer). While the Showcase was billed by Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aime as being about "playing games," it played out much like a press conference and there weren't nearly enough game kiosks to accommodate the assembled press.

The showcased games are strong titles, and exactly what you'd expect from Nintendo: new entries in its stable of core franchises. Super Mario 3D World and Retro's Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze made the most noise, along with Mario Kart 8 and the excellent-looking HD remake of The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker. While these games are sure to excite Nintendo's loyal audience, these aren't the sort of announcements that speak to the unconverted. The big "surprise" Nintendo promised at the end of the Wii U Software Showcase was comically irrelevant: the revelation that the Wii Fit trainer is now a character in the upcoming Super Smash Bros. game.

Walking around the show, third-party software support for Wii U was almost non-existent. Aside from already announced multi-platform games Batman: Arkham Origins and Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag, it appears that the majority of the U.S. video game industry has already written the Wii U off as a failure and moved on. The only promising non-Nintendo developed exclusive content were Platinum Games' Bayonetta 2 and Monolith Soft's impressive-looking X, both of which are being published by Nintendo itself.

Nintendo also neglected the 3DS at its presentation, which has a very strong lineup and perhaps the most promising of all the company's upcoming games, The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds.

The two titles that could have potentially caused a stir at E3, new Zelda and Metroid titles for Wii U, were missing in action. During E3, we interviewed Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto, who said the Zelda title for Wii U is making progress but was intentionally left out of the show.

NINTENDO PLAYS IT SAFE, BUT IS IT ENOUGH?

All in all, Nintendo's E3 showing felt like a half-measure. Faced with new systems from Microsoft and Sony, Nintendo made a minimal investment in this year's E3 and seemed content to let the other two console makers duke it out. While Nintendo didn't do any damage to its brand at E3 (something you can't say about Microsoft), it also didn't leave the show any better off than it was before. With the Wii U moldering on retail shelves and the already scant third-party publishing support for the system quickly drying up, that simply isn't good enough. Nintendo expended the bare minimum of effort at this year's E3 and failed to make any real impact on the public, press, or industry as a whole. As a result, we're awarding them our first-ever incomplete grade. As our teachers were fond of writing on our homework, Nintendo needs to try harder.

E3 Console Alternatives

APPLE, OUYA, AND OTHERS EXPAND MOBILE GAMING

The story of this year's E3 was Sony and Microsoft's upcoming consoles, but these aren't the only platforms that vied for headlines during the week of the convention. From Ouya to a new Android-based Mad Catz console, the future is filled with different systems to play games on. Apple also generated buzz at its Worldwide Developer's Conference in San Francisco on the Monday before E3 with an announcement that could have ramifications throughout the iOS game ecosystem.

Apple announced that its iOS 7 operating system (currently out to developers in beta and heading to consumers this fall) supports traditional game controllers, among other game developer tools. This means that any iOS device can become an even more versatile portable gaming option, giving developers another control option apart from the traditional touchscreen. Using an iOS 7 game with a controller, Airplay, and Apple TV (which can stream games in HD to your TV) brings Apple and its products in closer competition to the current home consoles – particularly as iPads

and iPhones become more powerful.

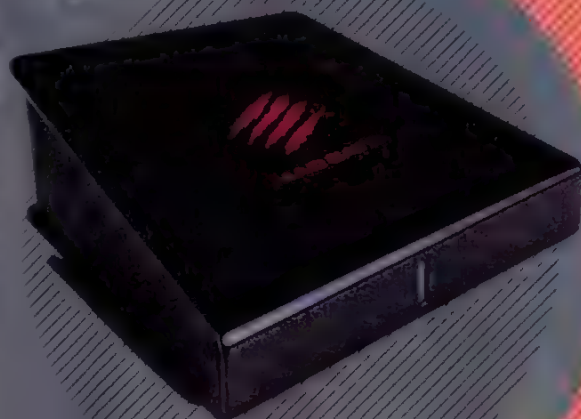
Speaking of competition, Apple is not the only company looking to expand the horizons of mobile gaming. Multiple companies are tapping the wide variety of Android-based games via dedicated gaming systems dubbed “micro-consoles.” Currently the most high-profile one is **Ouya** (look for our review next issue), which had an unceremonious presence at E3. To avoid paying the fees that come with exhibiting at E3, Ouya set up shop in a parking lot across the street from the LA Convention Center, where E3 was being held. This prompted the ESA –

which puts on the trade show – to hire trailers to park in front of Ouya's stand to obscure it from view. Ouya then went one step further and rented out the space in front of the trailers to display its banners. The police were subsequently called, but despite Ouya's brush with the law, perhaps its most stern confrontation will stem from the system's recent full public release.

Earlier this year **Nvidia** unveiled the Shield, an all-in-one controller and screen device that can play Android games at the steep price of \$349. During E3, the company dropped the price by \$50 and announced its June 27 release date. Despite the lower price, it's unknown what the appetite is for a system that is still \$300 and has more robust systems such as the currently available home consoles, and even the PlayStation 4, within striking distance of its price. Moreover, although the Shield can stream games from your PC, given that platform's controller support, why buy the Shield at all? ♦

THE MAD CATZ MOJO

Peripheral developer Mad Catz is throwing its hat into the Android-based console market with the Mojo Android Micro-Console, which is compatible with the Google Play store. Although the device enters a crowded space – competing with the Ouya, Nvidia Shield, GameStick, and others – Mad Catz's long-running experience with hardware gives it an edge in that particular department. The Mojo comes with the upcoming wireless Mad Catz C.T.R.I.R., and is compatible with other peripherals from the company. No price, release, or specs had been released for the Mojo as of press time.





THE TRAILERS OF E3 2013



As always, the show floor at this year's E3 featured hundreds of kiosks showing off the hottest upcoming games. These games are all over our Hot 50 list in this issue, but several promising titles weren't eligible for inclusion because they were only shown in trailer form. While they couldn't make the list, we felt that the following hands-off games still deserved some recognition.

1 METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

Cryptic trailers are an essential part of the buildup to any new Metal Gear title, providing fuel for speculation among gamers. The E3 trailer for Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain has enough cameos and strange dialogue to keep fans guessing, but it also has some substance layered in with the mysteries.

Though no live demos of the game were given, Konami and Kojima Productions used the nine-minute trailer to highlight new gameplay elements in the upcoming installment. The biggest change is the shift to an open-world structure, giving players more freedom in how they experience the story and undertake missions.

"Think that past Metal Gears are like movies. You just move along and really enjoy the ride," says director and series creator Hideo Kojima. "You can think of MGS V as a TV series. Each mission is an episode in a 12- or 24-episode story.... Of course, it's not linear; you can play any mission – any episode – at any time. But when you play all of them, then you'll get to the core of the story."

The world is more than a handful of story missions scattered around an empty landscape. Side activities are waiting to be found, though you have to balance them against finishing some of the main objectives. In other words, some of your main missions are time-sensitive, which may make it difficult to complete all of the side content.

The trailer shows Snake exploring the expansive Afghan desert. He is able to roam freely, find vehicles like jeeps and tanks, and (bizarrely) use a galloping horse as cover to slip past a checkpoint. Even though traversing large environments is new to the series, players can still expect traditional Metal Gear elements – like close-quarters-combat and surreal boss battles – to be a key component of The Phantom Pain. It also features a new iteration of Metal Gear Online for multiplayer.

"You can also enjoy the game with multiple devices – smartphone, tablet," Kojima says. "You can ultimately enjoy different missions and enjoy MGS V from anywhere at any time." Kojima didn't elaborate with further details on that point, but we will undoubtedly see more announcements in the future with regard to companion software on mobile devices.

Metal Gear Solid V is coming to PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, as well as PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. "We're using the current generation as a basis," says Kojima. "We're trying to really reach the top of the current generation right now – 360 and PS3 – and see how much we can take it up for the next generation."



This boy is officially named Eli, though many fans are speculating that he is a young Liquid Snake. That would make sense given the amount of time that passes while Big Boss is in a coma, but Kojima Productions has not confirmed the connection.

2 DRAGON AGE INQUISITION

It didn't show any gameplay, but the CG trailer for the next Dragon Age promises the series will pick up the threads from previous entries – including Morrigan's fate. The team at BioWare has emphasized the time and care going into this installment (pushing the release out to fall 2014), likely to ease any apprehension from gamers after the disappointing Dragon Age II.



3 MIRROR'S EDGE 2

EA and DICE created a cult classic with the original Mirror's Edge, and many of its fans worried that Faith's parkour-centric first adventure would also be her last. Shown via a CG trailer, nothing else has been revealed about the title other than a hint of it being a prequel and a vague release window of "when it's ready."



4

4 STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT

Mirror's Edge 2 wasn't the only surprise sequel EA pulled out of its hat at its E3 conference. A brief teaser didn't let us know much of anything about the upcoming Star Wars: Battlefront, but the mere confirmation of its existence was enough to excite tons of fans who thought they'd never see the series return.

5

5 FINAL FANTASY XV

The long silence is over. Square Enix finally provided fans with an update on the status of Final Fantasy Versus XIII: It has become Final Fantasy XV, and is only coming to the PS4 and Xbox One. The trailer demonstrates that much progress has been made since the title's last showing, highlighting the fast-paced combat system and cinematic action. Even though it looked impressive, Square Enix declined to give a release time frame.

8

7 BELOW

Developed by Capybara Games (creators of Superbrothers Sword & Sworcery EP), this roguelike tasks players with surviving randomized one-screen dungeons. Not much was shown from a gameplay perspective, but Below's developer says that the visually unique title features action/RPG elements along with a permadeath system.

8 SUNSET OVERDRIVE

The lighthearted tone of the next title from Insomniac Games is closer to Ratchet & Clank than its more recent shooter, Fuse. The Xbox One exclusive Sunset Overdrive features stylized, cartoonish graphics and plenty of crazy, zip-lining gameplay including but not limited to mowing down abominations with a gun that spits out several deadly vinyl records per second.

7

9

b THE ORDER: 1886

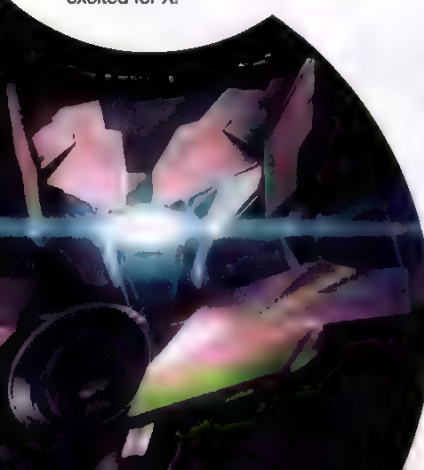
An ancient order fighting against an inhuman menace isn't a new theme for gaming, but the team from Ready at Dawn has its own spin on the concept. The studio's first new IP (after developing several successful handheld titles) draws from Arthurian legend and depicts an alternate timeline in which humanity uses sci-fi weapons to fight for its survival.



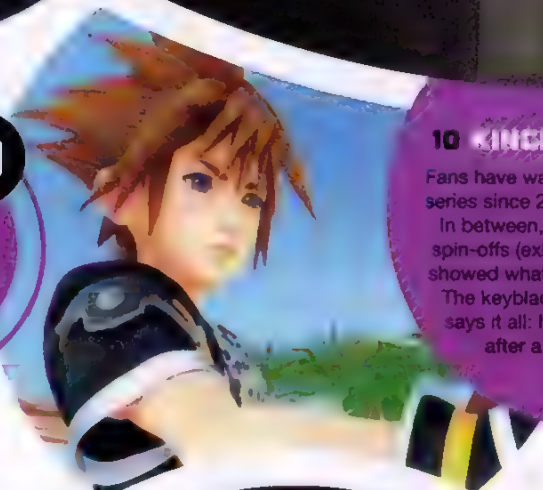
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q X [WORKING TITLE]

Monolith Soft found a home on the Wii with Xenoblade Chronicles, and now the team is creating a new RPG for the Wii U. X is still a part of the Xeno series, using a mixture of mechs and on-foot segments to create a unique blend of open-world exploration and combat. If the trailer is any indication, fans of the studios' previous work (and Japanese RPGs in general) have every reason to be excited for X.



10



10 KINGDOM HEARTS III

Fans have wanted a true sequel in this series since 2006's Kingdom Hearts II. In between, Square Enix stuck with spin-offs (exhibited in III's trailer) that showed what it took to get Sora here. The keyblade placed on the beach says it all: It's time to step back in after a seven-year break.

11 QUANTUM BREAK

This new IP is coming from Remedy Entertainment, creators of Max Payne and Alan Wake. Featuring time-manipulation abilities, this shooter allows players to inhabit several different characters. Episodes of a live-action television show will be inserted into the game's narrative, and may even give hints on how to progress. ♦



11

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The logo for St. Zombie's Island is a semi-circular emblem. The top half is a dark blue arc with the words "ST. ZOMBIE'S ISLAND" in white, stylized, slightly distressed capital letters. Below the arc is a bright orange and yellow sunset or sunrise. In the foreground, there is a dark silhouette of a landscape. On the left, a zombie hand with long, sharp claws reaches up towards the sun. On the right, a palm tree stands with its fronds reaching towards the sun.

DROP IN FOR A BITE!

[illegible]

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A close-up photograph of a road sign for Nashville, Tennessee. The sign is white with red lettering and a red border. The word "NASHVILLE" is clearly visible in large, bold, red capital letters. Above it, the word "TENNESSEE" is partially visible. In the foreground, the front end of a dark-colored car is visible, including the hood and headlights.

The Rockstar Energy Drink logo, featuring the word "ROCKSTAR" in a stylized, jagged font with a yellow star replacing the letter "A", and "ENERGY DRINK" in a smaller, simpler font below it.


**TURTLE
BEACH**

**Cracker
Jack'D**



Six Flags

Nintendo®

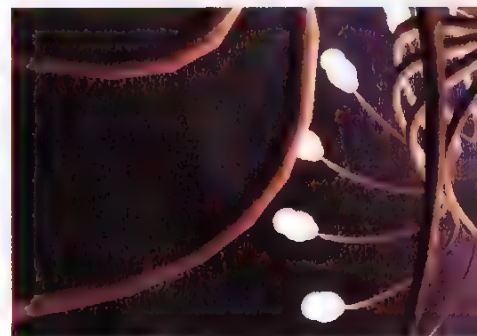
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The Downloadable & Independent Games of E3

A few years ago, it wouldn't have been hard to offer a comprehensive look at the independent game scene at a big show like E3. These days, so many great developers are showing off their work that it's hard to know where to start. We've included some of our favorite indie games, like *Transistor* and *The Witness*, in our E3 Hot 50 lineup on p. 36, but those were only some of the great downloadable titles at the show. I've gathered more favorites here.

Looking for more info on downloadable and independent games? Check out gameinformer.com/impulse for regular updates, news, previews, and reviews. For more in this issue, don't miss our Hot 50 entries on *The Walking Dead: 400 Days* (p. 52), *Transistor* (p. 53), *The Witness* (p. 63), *Mercenary Kings* (p. 77), *Contrast* (p. 81), and *Lovers in a Dangerous Spacetime* (p. 85). You can also check out our reviews of *State of Decay* (p. 92), *The Swapper* (p. 94), *Gunpoint* (p. 95), and *Kingdom Rush: Frontiers* (p. 96).



Charlie Murder

Platform: Xbox 360

Developer: Ska Studios

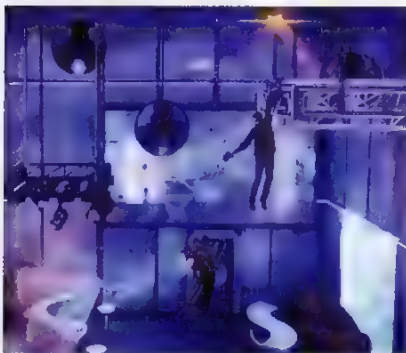
I've been a big fan of Ska Studios' previous work on games like *The Dishwasher: Dead Samurai*, and *Charlie Murder*'s punk-rock aesthetic is an appropriate follow-through on the developer's established tone. The members of the punk band Charlie Murder are on a tear through the city to combat a rival death-metal band, and the war manifests as some great four-player brawler action. The side-scrolling fighting feels tight and fast, echoing Ska's previous work. However, lots of fun additions flesh out the traditional beat 'em up formula, including RPG-like character building, stat-boosting tattoos, team-up attacks, and brewing power-up beer.



Hohokum

Platform: PlayStation 4, PlayStation 3, Vita
Developer: Honeyslug

The experimental and whimsical Hohokum had a tough job at this year's E3 – its focus on exploration, musical creation, and freeform gameplay doesn't exactly mesh with the roaring show floor. Nonetheless, a few minutes with Hohokum are enough to sell its charm. Players control a twirling little kite-like creature as it floats through a variety of stages. Each level has its own distinctive structure, from a world of enclosed liquid spheres to a land of floating islands. As you fly, passing by and touching objects in the world adds to the musical soundtrack, which includes tunes from licensed artists off the Ghostly International label. A vivid backdrop of colorful characters and objects adds to the artistic appeal. As a bonus, all versions of the game support cross-save, so you can leave your home machine and keep playing on the run.



Magic: The Gathering: Duels of the Planeswalker 2014

Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC, iOS, Android
Developer: Stainless Games

The massively popular collectible card game has already had incarnations on digital platforms in recent years, but the new 2014 installment features some cool innovations that captured attention at this year's E3. Most prominently, the single-player campaign now features a fleshed out story complete with voiced cutscenes and themed enemy encounters. The new version of the game also includes dramatically expanded options for deck customization, including a sealed format campaign. In this mode, players receive six booster packs of fifteen cards each, and form decks with the resulting cards. An auto-build function can make you the best deck possible, or you can build from scratch.

Flashback

Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
Developer: VectorCell

Older players may recall this hit sci-fi game from its release way back in 1992. The futuristic tale focuses on Conrad, an amnesiac secret agent in search of his lost memories as he fights his way through a bevy of alien foes. The game combines action, shooting, puzzles, and storytelling, and was a big hit when it originally released. The original game director and several of the other developers from the original team have come together to create this remake, which maintains the general structure and storyline of the original, but dramatically expands the scope. The visuals translate to a 2.5D presentation, new characters and dialog expand the original narrative, and a skill and character customization feature broadens the appeal. After a brief snippet of play, I was more than ready to explore this dramatic reinvention of an already classic game.



Max: The Curse of Brotherhood

Platform: Xbox 360
Developer: Press Play

I liked a lot of the ideas behind Press Play's original Max & The Magic Marker, but the ability to use the marker to draw in objects left the puzzles feeling too freeform. That's one reason I'm looking forward to the sequel, which maintains the fun mechanic of using a magic marker, but introduces more structured puzzles and a higher dose of pure platforming challenge. The level navigation in the E3 demo is engaging, sometimes slowing down time at the last second to let Max draw in an object that saves him from certain death. The cartoon-like art style pops off the screen, and the levels shown so far are varied and visually engaging. Max: The Curse of Brotherhood looks like a strong contender to watch, whether you played its predecessor or not.

The Recital

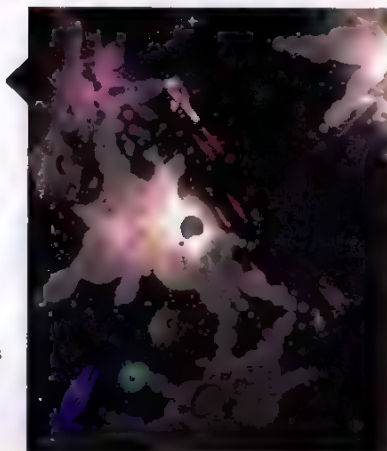
Platform: PC
Developer: Funkmasonry Industries

Exclusively available for the Oculus Rift, The Recital was one of the most impressive and engrossing demos for the upcoming VR device. This indie puzzle adventure revolves around a pianist as he prepares for a big performance. Players hold a controller, but the game doesn't use traditional input methods. Instead, holding down a trigger moves forward in the direction you're currently facing in the VR world of the game. The dreamlike experience is simultaneously surreal and eerily realistic, and speaks to the potential of the Rift for creating novel gaming experiences. Moreover, the puzzles are original and surprising, often focusing on literally changing your perspective on the situation.

Galak-Z

Platform: PlayStation 4
Developer: 17-Bit Studios

The makers of the excellent Skulls of the Shogun are tackling a new genre. Galak-Z mixes the classic fun of 2D space shooters with the complex AI, tactics, and open world exploration found in many modern games. Players control a spaceship as it battles its way through a side-scrolling, open-world version of outer space. Enemy pilots actively seek you out, running patrols in search of you, and reporting your location to larger units that converge on your ship. The development team references Far Cry 3 and R-Type III as chief inspirations – a fascinating combination that has me eager to see more.



LocoCycle

Platform: Xbox One, Xbox 360
Developer: Twisted Pixel

Twisted Pixel took advantage of E3 to show off its insane motorcycle racing/fighting game on Xbox One. The new version certainly looks pretty, running 60 frames per second at 1080p. However, it's still the unusual concept behind LocoCycle that is drawing the most attention. You control a malfunctioning combat-optimized AI motorcycle. In a fit of madness, the cycle drags its unfortunate Spanish-speaking mechanic, Pablo, along for its outlaw run. Rapid fire sequences hop back and forth between high-speed chase gameplay and mid-air melee combat, as motorcycle and Pablo alike flip and slap enemy combatants out of the sky. Loco Cycle definitely elicits chuckles in the brief demos I've played; I'm hopeful that the final version can maintain the manic tone over longer play sessions.



massive

DUST 514

A LOW-END SHOOTER WITH **SKY-HIGH** AMBITIONS

Your corporation is under siege. Enemy raiders have cut off vital fuel supplies, and your fleet of magnificent deep-space war machines painstakingly assembled over months is useless without power. The call goes out: All hands, log in and suit up. Engaging the enemy with everything from hover tanks to laser pistols on the ground is the only way to defend the territory you and hundreds of your online friends have carved out from a hostile galaxy.

by Adam Biessener

I've dreamt of an MMO game that ties it all together for as long as I can remember. Interstellar diplomacy, trade, war with personal on-the-ground battles, and an endless progression system are all integral parts of my ideal MMO. Dust 514 and its sister game Eve Online are dangerously close to bringing that decades-long dream into reality. Building a sandbox where players can influence the course of galactic wars between player factions through dominance in Battlefield-style sci-fi multiplayer shooter matches is an incredible feat, and Dust/Eve developer CCP Games deserves recognition for pushing the boundaries of gaming.

Like Eve, though, Dust sounds better on paper than it is in reality. Its lofty ideals stand on the shoulders of thousands of brutalized newbies, hundreds of dollars spent on consumable items lost on death, and dozens of hours wasted navigating the unintuitive menus that chart its labyrinthine upgrade systems. Although it's a free-to-play shooter—one of the most inviting types of game in existence—Dust demands dedication despite its session-based structure that breaks the action into digestible 32-player deathmatches and territory-domination battles.

Power-granting character progression is nothing new to multiplayer shooters, but Dust takes it to a level far beyond that of Call of Duty or Battlefield. The opportunities for customizing your loadout are enormous, which comes with a large variance in combat capabilities. Each loadout has dozens of



slots that can be filled with various boosts to armor, speed, shields, regeneration, and more. Zeroing in on the right balance of weaponry, support abilities, and passive boosts is an ongoing process that would feel at home in the hardest-core item-driven MMORPG.

On top of growing your character's skills and equipment, you buy everything from rifles and armor suits to tanks and dropships to deploy in battle—and each one costs individually. The sums involved aren't huge (on the order of pennies or less per use), and many items are available to purchase with in-game currency. You can buy real-money currency from fellow players and acquire the goods that way as well. Nonetheless, the often derided "pay to win" scenario is definitely at play in Dust.

These systems naturally lead to the state that Dust is currently in. The "haves" join a group of regular players and affiliate themselves with Eve corporations (or put their services up for sale). These clans can have a great time either crushing the opposition with advanced tactics that use the best equipment money can buy, or having epic battles against similarly geared and organized foes. The have-nots try their luck as lone wolves, scoring what kills they can until the buzz-saw of an organized group shows up and dismantles the other side with ease.

Forgiving Dust's shoddy execution is doable,

if not trivial, when you're playing on the high end that fulfills so much of Dust's promise.

The low-end solo experience doesn't channel the awesome metagame nearly well enough to redeem the lacking gameplay, though. The graphics would have been rough at the beginning of this console generation, with regular pop-up and poor textures despite the barely acceptable framerate. The combat design is serviceable but uninspired, with standard objectives playing out over forgettable maps. The network performance is in dramatic contrast to the lacking presentation, proving reliable with lag- and drop-free gameplay in my time with the game.

Dust 514 does what it sets out to do, linking a competitive multiplayer PlayStation 3 shooter with the persistent player-driven galaxy of Eve Online. Enjoying it for what it is requires a willful blindness to the enormous strides that multiplayer shooters have made in the last decade, though, and the tie between in-game power and real-money purchases pushes the boundaries of what I'll accept in a competitive game. For all the interesting things going on with player politics and corporate warfare at the high end, Dust's failure to engage new players and provide them a meaningful and fun experience at all comparable to other modern console shooters is a huge, missed opportunity.





MARVEL HEROES

More action than MMO

by Matt Miller

Secret Identity Studios is taking a new approach to the MMO space, and despite numerous concerns about the tech and game structure, I can't deny my enthusiasm. The gameplay model popularized by Diablo first entered the superhero realm with Raven Software's X-Men Legends and Marvel Ultimate Alliance. Secret Identity borrows that concept and adds a massively multi-player component.

The heart of Marvel Heroes, and the only real reason to play, lies right in the title – the heroes. Over 20 characters are all playable as of launch, with more on the way in subsequent patches. Each character is effectively his or her own class, boasting a unique set of crazy superpowers, a customizable upgrade tree, and distinct gear. Eschewing MMO traditions, players choose one of the established Marvel good guys to play rather than craft a hero from scratch. The reward is that you get to control and level characters like Hulk, Wolverine, Iron Man, and Black Widow. The downside is you see characters that look just like your avatar running around in the world. Ultimately, it's a price I'm willing to pay, and I had a blast powering through levels with numerous heroes, just to see how they were different.

Every character/class feels distinct and powerful, from Black Panther's agile martial arts to Scarlet Witch's reality-altering area control spells. The isometric view makes for some click-happy fights, and your hero is powerful enough to single-handedly bring down a dozen enemies in one furious melee. If anything, it's often too easy to breeze through a fight. A hot-bar of powers offers access to a suitable array of room-clearing moves, but also allows you to explore the best rotation of stuns, knockbacks, damage-dealing, and other effects to optimize your grind. Action is faster and less structured

than most MMOs, and the skill threshold to succeed isn't terribly high.

Heroes level independently, so you'll have to power through the same regions again and again with each character – a big bummer that robs some of the magic of the process. Secret Identity would be well served to invest in more branching mission paths, as well as a wider variety of side missions to help keep things fresh. A single runthrough doesn't take nearly as long as many MMOs, so it's clear the developer is banking on players wanting to go back through and try a different hero. Thankfully, money and other inventory is shared across characters, so subsequent runs tend to move faster. If you fall in love with a particular character, some challenge rooms and a beta version of PVP open up at the end of the campaign, but both are limited in scope.

Marvel Heroes runs the gamut of familiar comic locales, from a trip to Xavier's Westchester school to a sojourn into the dinosaur-inhabited Savage Land. Areas are beautiful, but the procedurally generated level design is often uninteresting. On the bright side, these sometimes lackluster levels are populated by a wide variety of enemy types, and it's a lot of fun to throw down against mutant-hunting Sentinels in one zone, only to confront A.I.M.-constructed robot monstrosities in another.

Like any MMO, a modicum of social features is present, but I don't anticipate people engaging very much. Guild options and chat is available, but it's barely used. The focus here is on action and leveling, and most folks don't care about much else – which is just fine. Secret Identity has wisely implemented some auto-matchmaking for group instances, which show up organically over the course of the story. These pick-up groups tend to be more than adequate for a throwdown against a big

boss like Magneto or Kingpin, and the parties dissolve just as quickly after the instance completes. However, it's jarring when you're added to a group that is already partway through an instance. The far more enjoyable way to play is to hop in with a couple of friends and level as a group.

Technical problems have plagued the early weeks after launch, including dramatic sound bugs that drop audio entirely, front-end client issues, and the grievous inability to play nicely with 32-bit operating systems, resulting in constant crashes. The in-game public play spaces are often flooded with too many players. As a result, event boss battles are a complete mess, as dozens of heroes fire off explosive powers all at once in an indecipherable splash of color surrounding an enemy villain. That latter problem seems endemic to the design, but I hope Secret Identity and publisher Gazillion get a handle on the tech issues soon.

Even with its problems, I can't get enough of Marvel Heroes. I'm a sucker for all the character choices, and find myself regularly starting new playthroughs to try someone new. Marvel Heroes is also playable from start to finish as a free-to-play experience, and a fun one at that. Every player starts with one free hero chosen from a selection of five starters, and new costumes and characters appear as pick-ups throughout the game. Even so, I recommend shelling out the few bucks required to get a hero you actually want, since living out that fantasy is at the root of the game's fun.

Marvel Heroes may not be polished, and it still needs to grow in depth and length, but as a grand experiment in combining traditional action/RPGs and MMOs, this is a worthwhile start. For a fun comic book cooperative experience with a no- or low-cost barrier to entry, you could do worse.

interview



Portrait: Ed Carmona

DICE's Next-Gen Focus

As vice president and general manager of DICE, **Karl Magnus Troedsson** oversees the company's game development, helping guide the blockbuster Battlefield franchise. We recently spoke to him about Battlefield, Star Wars: Battlefront, and the new Mirror's Edge project.

interview by Matt Helgeson

The announcement that DICE is working on a new Star Wars: Battlefront game caused a lot of excitement. How did that come together? Did you lobby for the project when you learned that EA was getting the Star Wars license?

Not everyone realizes that, inside of EA, the communications between higher-up executives, even above my head with my boss, are quite quick and very emotional. We work at DICE because we're very passionate about building entertainment in the form of games – we are very busy with Battlefield, and we're building a Mirror's Edge game as well. But when I heard from my boss that EA was actually looking into a deal concerning Star Wars, I approached him and said, "Wait, what's going on here? Why haven't you asked us if we want to build a game?" He didn't ask us because he thought that we were too busy, and we weren't interested in working on a licensed product. But when I talked it through with [everyone] at the studio, they were so excited about working on Star Wars because we grew up with it. I love Star Wars. They are movies I've seen the most [times]. We looked at our plans and said, "This is complete madness to try to take on this project as well, but is there any way that we can do it?"

After some creative thinking of how you run studios, we found a way that we believe will allow us to do this. Then it was a no-brainer. Everyone here wanted to do it, so we just said yes.

Is the game primarily going to be developed by the DICE L.A. studio, or is it being done in partnership with Stockholm?

The DICE L.A. studio is currently helping out on Battlefield 4. We didn't start that studio, at least in the beginning, to take on a full product. In my experience, that is a sure way to get a new studio into trouble – by giving them too much responsibility. The way that we're going to look at it is that all the projects coming out of DICE are being built by DICE. That might mean we have a bulk of the people here in Stockholm, but there might also be people at the L.A. studio helping out on the project. Further down the line, if that studio is successful, we'll put full titles there as well.

People have made a lot about the difference between the PlayStation 4 having 8GB of GDDR5 RAM versus the 5GB of DDR3 RAM allotted toward the gaming partition on the Xbox One. Do you see that as an advantage for the PlayStation 4, or is that overblown?

More memory or more CPU or GPU power – whatever kind of power we get out of a machine – more is always better, especially

for the kind of games that we build. We have a long heritage of PC, and PC is a platform that has been scaled very well over the years. Naturally we're very excited now seeing consoles that actually close in on what the PCs of today can do – even though it won't take long before the PCs can do even more. It is interesting to see the new concepts like cloud computing that Microsoft has held up, to see what we can do to bring this scalability onto consoles as well. But it's still in the early days here, at least for us, regarding how we're going to utilize it and what we can do in the future.

Kinect 2 is going to ship with every Xbox One, which opens the door to using it in your games. Is that something you're interested in, using gesture control, voice, or the cameras?

We have a pretty pragmatic view. Instead of just trying to tick all the boxes of features you can do with new hardware, we look at what actually adds value [for] our players. When you look at the kind of games that we build – or Battlefield at least – it is a first-person shooter that is very much about skill. Input is really important. You need to have very precise control over what's going on, and trying to do something like that with motion control input does not make sense – not if you want to keep the same kind of formula of the game as we [have] now. You'd need to build a different kind of shooter. But there are other places where it will make sense, and we are going to use it for other things in the game, but we haven't announced exactly what.

Some next-gen games, Respawn's Titanfall for example, have decided they aren't having a traditional single-player campaign, which is what DICE did with Battlefield 1942 and Battlefield 2. Is it still worth investing a lot of money and resources into creating single-player campaigns for franchises like Battlefield?

That's an interesting question, and I actually get it a lot. You put it very nicely. I sometimes get the question "Why the – bad word – are you actually building single player? You should just focus on multiplayer." We're very passionate about building single player. We like it personally as game developers. We find it intriguing to get better at it in every game we do. We also see that there are a lot of people who like to play single player, especially people that come to us and say that they enjoy preparing for multiplayer by playing some single player to catch up.

But, with that said, there is some truth to what you're saying. The current scope of single-player campaigns are growing immensely. It's a big investment. There's a lot of time, there's a lot of people, etc. So we have to see what happens in the future. We have a new take, or a semi-new take on how we want to build our single player now. We've said we

want to bring signature multiplayer elements into single player – things like player choice, more open areas, more vehicles, and those sorts of things. We're going to see how that turns out. We have a strong belief in it, but as we do with all products, if it doesn't [work], then we'll take a look and rethink it for the next product.

The announcement of a new Mirror's Edge game caused a stir at E3. How long have you been working on the project, and how hard was it to sell to EA?

That's a long story with a lot of forks in it in various directions. At DICE, we're very proud of the first Mirror's Edge game. It was something that took a lot of thinking, and the team that built it at the time really had a strong idea of what they wanted to build. Even at that time, it was hard to convince people that a first-person, parkour-inspired game could be something. We're very proud of the game, especially how the community really latched on and thought so fondly of the game.

At the same time, it wasn't a huge commercial hit, as you know. At DICE we have a long history of building games that we believe in, games that drive towards quality and innovation, but we also have a history of thinking about the business side of things as well. Because we know that success needs to marry both. So we've now been spending a lot of time talking about how we want to bring back the Mirror's Edge franchise. We do some prototyping thinking about it, sketching on paper, etc., but we are now at the place where a lot of things align again. We have Frostbite 3, which is the right engine to do this on. We have the new consoles coming. We have a team that is ready to pick up the mantle, who are actually building this game. There are a lot of things synchronizing now – meaning that for us it's the right time to start building it.

Is there a way to do Mirror's Edge with having realistic sales goals? In the industry now, for example, Square said Tomb Raider was a failure after it sold 3.6 million in a month.

I can't comment on sales expectations on a title like that. I think there's a concept in console games today [that] people need to wrap their heads around as developers. Our way of thinking about it is that you can build console games that can be successful at lower volumes of units sold – but you have to plan for that in the beginning.

That's the way we've been thinking about all the games we do, including the Battlefield games. Battlefield hasn't always been a huge franchise. There was a time where we had been turning over every coin and looking at the other side before we actually spent it. People need to think about the investment up front and then have realistic sales targets so you can build the game and be successful with it. ☺

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

**1998
GRAND DESIGNS**
Troedsson gets his first job in development, as a level designer and artist at the Swedish company Unique Development Studios

**2000
NEW VISION**
After moving into a producer role at UDS, Troedsson departs the studio for a job at a small game publisher in Sweden called Vision Park

**2001
RETURN TO ROOTS**
Troedsson quickly realized that he missed game development and nabs a job at DICE – a company he admired based on its early pinball games

**2002
RACING AHEAD**
He gets his first credit as producer at DICE on Rallysport Challenge, a racing game for Windows and the original Xbox

**2002
GROUNDBREAKING**
DICE and EA release the innovative Battlefield 1942, which breaks new ground in the crowded WWII shooter genre

**2005
CONSOLE SHOOTING**
DICE enters the console shooter market with Battlefield 2: Modern Combat

**2008
BAD BOYS & COOL GIRLS**
The spin-off Battlefield: Bad Company, which places an emphasis on storytelling and humorous characters, is released. The company also launches Mirror's Edge, a hip parkour game with a female protagonist

**2010
HIGHER RANK**
Troedsson is promoted to general manager of DICE

**2011
BLOCKBUSTER**
The highly successful Battlefield 3 is released, bringing the franchise to new heights in popularity

**2013
BIG ANNOUNCEMENTS**
At E3, DICE reveals that its working on Star Wars: Battlefront and a new Mirror's Edge game

gear

SONOS PLAYBAR

by Tim Tracy, Mike Weisman & Matt Miller

Sonos bills its wireless soundbar as “for music lovers,” but this clever device excels at pumping out many types of audio. The Playbar’s nine speakers (six mid-range and three tweeters) work with your HDTV, Spotify, iTunes, Pandora, and more to produce impressive audio quality. The speaker comes with a Sonos Bridge, which plugs into your wireless router and links together other Sonos audio equipment, resulting in a network of high-quality speakers that can be controlled with a free iPhone, iPad, or Android app, as well as your standard remote.

Game audio also benefits from the Playbar’s top-notch sound. Every footfall and scratchy monster moan is audible in Naughty Dog’s post-apocalyptic hit, *The Last of Us*, potentially saving players from being caught offguard. *Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon*’s laser rifle also has a subtle, satisfying bass that doesn’t come through on an HDTV’s built-in speakers. It’s more powerful than most soundbars we’ve used, but doesn’t match the chest-rattling boom that comes from a surround set with a subwoofer.

The Playbar comes with two drawbacks: its price and lack of iTunes Match support. You can buy a capable 5.1 surround system and receiver for \$699, so the real draw for the Sonos comes from its ability to wirelessly toss songs from your phone to the soundbar. However, you’re out of luck if you backed up your iTunes library on the cloud, because the Sonos Playbar won’t stream them from your iPhone. Only downloaded songs from your library can be played on the soundbar.

The Sonos’ Playbar is worthwhile if you’re looking for a more substantial sound than your HDTV can deliver and don’t want to mess with wires or mounting speakers.

It's more powerful than most soundbars we've

used, but doesn't match the chest-rattling boom that

comes from a surround set with a subwoofer.

VERY GOOD

\$699 | sonos.com/introducing/playbar



ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS 2ND EDITION PLAYER'S HANDBOOK

The second edition of Wizards of the Coast's seminal Dungeons & Dragons introduced a lot of people to the world of RPGs. Now the original rulebook is being republished so a new generation can experience this classic rule set.

\$49.95
wizards.com

DUCK DYNASTY: SEASON 3

The Robertsons have made a fortune selling duck calls, but money hasn't spoiled their quirky southern charm. This is one of the best family shows on television thanks to the way the Robertsons work out all their family disputes in a rustic southern fashion.

\$19.98
shop.history.com

THE OCEAN AT THE END OF THE LANE BY NEIL GAIMAN

Urban fantasy legend Neil Gaiman's first mature novel in over eight years is as dark as ever. After a man commits suicide inside his family car, it stirs up ancient powers from another world, and a seven-year-old boy must fight for his life.

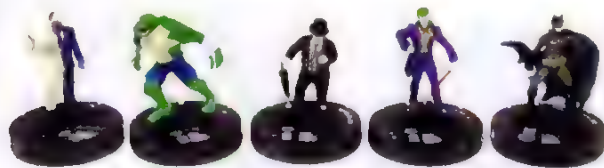
\$25.99
neilgaiman.com

TRINITY: A GRAPHIC HISTORY OF THE FIRST ATOMIC BOMB

The race to build the first atomic bomb stretched from the laboratories of nineteenth-century Europe to a top-secret government compound in Mexico. Jonathan Fetter-Vorn depicts the entire sweeping historical narrative in this stunning debut novel.

\$14.95
us.macmillan.com

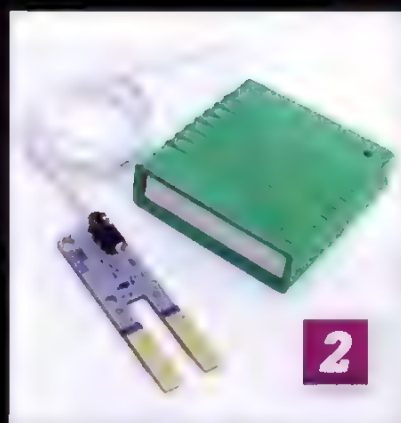
1



1 Batman: Gotham City Strategy

Batman's famous rogue's gallery takes center stage in this excellent and accessible board game from WizKids. Each player takes on the role of one of the Dark Knight's greatest foes — Joker, Penguin, Two-Face, or Killer Croc — and vies for control of the city. Your villain levels up, gains henchmen, and uses money, information, and power to solidify a criminal empire. Special abilities unique to each bad guy add an asymmetric kick to the competition, but the real fun lies in inciting Batman to take out your adversaries as he moves around the board fighting crime. The five gorgeous painted minis included in the game double as playable figures in the popular HeroClix collectible game.

\$49.99 | wizkidsgames.com



2

2 Supermechanical Twine

Stringing the real world to the Internet, this inexpensive, customizable kit lets you rig up a household network that can alert you to environmental changes. Twine's basic kit can sense vibration, orientation, and temperature, which create a host of unique applications. For example, you can set up Twine to text you when someone knocks on your front door, send you a tweet when the laundry is done, or have the device light up when your plants start to get dry. Twine even emails you when its batteries are running low. Supermechanical's browser-based programming software is fairly straightforward and easy to use. This Internet-of-things device is geared towards the engineering and DIY crowd, but Twine's nifty (if not always necessary) applications can make average Joes feel high-omniscient.

\$124 | store.supermechanical.com

3 Nintendo 3DS XL Circle Pad Pro

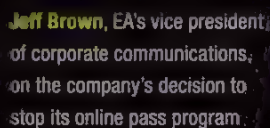
Much like the Circle Pad Pro that came out last year for the original 3DS, this cozy crib snaps onto your Nintendo 3DS XL, adding a second analog stick and a few extra shoulder buttons that give Nintendo's large handheld a more comfortable, controller-like feel. The second analog input is extremely useful for games like Resident Evil: Revelations, Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D, and Monster Hunter 3 Ultimate. Unfortunately, the Circle Pad Pro's extra size makes it hard to slide your handheld into your back pocket, and it requires separate batteries to run. Still, we're happy that 3DS XL owners can finally get a second analog stick.

\$19.99 | store.nintendo.com

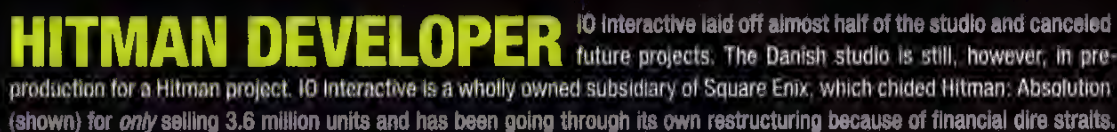


3

"The whole idea of packaging it up with an online pass, clearly it was not popular, so we listened to people and we stopped doing it."



can rejoice with the news that all PlayStation 4 games that do not require special peripherals like the PlayStation camera will support remote play. This means that you can play PS4 titles (with downscaled graphics and possibly tweaked controls) on the Vita via a Wi-Fi stream from the home console.



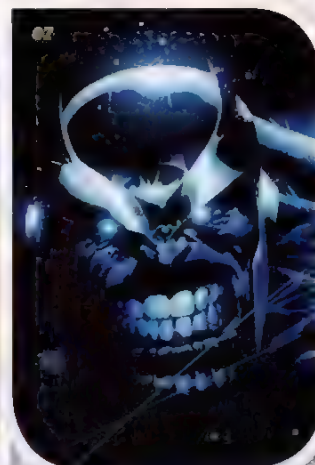
started its E3 Nintendo Direct broadcast with delays for *Wii Fit U* (now slated for winter) and *Wii Party U* (no revised date given), and later the company announced that *Mario Golf World Tour* for the 3DS is also not coming out in its original time frame. The latter title will now appear in 2014.



01



04
Pikmin 3



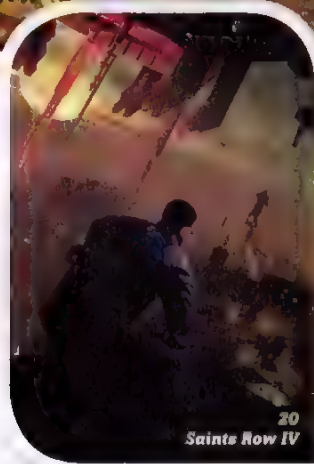
06
Dragon's Crown



13
Payday 2



16
Disney Infinity



20
Saints Row IV



27
Madden NFL 25



28

August

01 QuakeCon 2013

Gamers lugging their PCs in tow descend upon the Hilton Anatole in Dallas today for the first of four days of QuakeCon. In addition to competing against other gamers in the BYOC (bring-your-own-computer) room, attendees can get their hands on Bethesda's latest games and hear John Carmack detail the future in his keynote.

04 New Releases

› Pikmin 3 (Wii U)

06 New Releases

› Disney's Planes (Wii U, Wii, 3DS, DS)
› Dragon's Crown (PS3, Vita)
› The Sims 3: Dragon Valley (PC)
› Tales of Xillia (PS3)

07 Thanos Returns

Marvel Comics' summer event kicks off today in *Infinity*, a six-part comic series that unites the heroes of space and Earth against Thanos. If the name of the book hints at plot, Thanos may have his eye on the Infinity Gems again.

09 Matt Damon Saves Us All

In the year 2154, Matt Damon gets power armor. That's all you need to know about the sci-fi action movie *Elysium*, opening in theaters today. He uses the armor to decapitate robots, storm a cyber utopia, and intimidate Jodie Foster. It sounds like the *Good Will Hunting* sequel that everyone wanted.

11 New Releases

› Mario & Luigi: Dream Team (3DS)

13 New Releases

› Payday 2 (PS3, 360, PC)

16 The Superhero Event of the Year?

The first *Kick-Ass* was a violent delight. All signs point to the sequel, which opens today, taking the insanity to the next level. Hit-Girl returns to steal the show again, and the guy who played McLovin' evolves into a villain with a name we can't print here (hint: It's a naughty word).

18 New Releases

› Disney Infinity
(Wii U, PS3, 360, Wii, PC, 3DS)

20 New Releases

› The Bureau: XCOM Declassified (PS3, 360, PC)
› Saints Row IV (PS3, 360, PC)
› Splinter Cell: Blacklist (Wii U, PS3, 360, PC)

21 Gamescom 2013

The next-generation war continues at Gamescom, Cologne, Germany's annual video game convention. Most publishers are showing playable PlayStation 4 and Xbox One titles, and this show wouldn't be complete without a few surprise announcements. The show is open to everyone from August 22-25.

23 Drunk During a Robot Apocalypse

If you enjoyed *Shaun of the Dead* and *Hot Fuzz*, make your way to the theater to see *The World's End* today. The film stars Simon Pegg, Nick Frost, and Martin Freeman

as old friends returning to their hometown for a bar crawl. The catch: Robots have taken over the town. The beer flows as all hell breaks loose and robots are destroyed.

27 New Releases

› Final Fantasy XIV Online: A Realm Reborn (PS3, PC)
› Killer is Dead (PS3, 360)
› Lego Legends of Chima: Laval's Journey (DS)
› Lost Planet 3 (PS3, 360, PC)
› Madden NFL 25 (PS3, 360)
› Painkiller: Hell & Damnation (PS3, 360)
› Phineas and Ferb: Quest for Cool Stuff (Wii U, 360, Wii, 3DS, DS)
› Sweet Fuse: At Your Side (PSP)

28 He-Man vs. Superman

A puzzling crossover begins today in the first issue of *DC Universe vs. Masters of the Universe*. That's right, He-Man and Superman are teaming up to take on Skeletor and what DC Comics calls "his mysterious new master." The first issue features two covers: one featuring the heroes of Earth, the other the heroes of Eternia.

30 PAX Prime 2013

The convention season keeps rolling with PAX Prime 2013. Starting today, Seattle's streets are filled with cosplayers and gamers eager to get their hands on the latest and greatest in video games. This show is packed with panels featuring developers, and a show floor with playable games.

2013



HOT 50

With the Xbox One and PlayStation 4 taking center stage, we finally received a deluge of news about next-generation games from publishers of all shapes and sizes. The show floor was packed with new IP that challenge the boundaries of traditional game genres. From potential blockbusters like *Destiny* that blend together elements of shooters, RPGs, and MMOs to a large collection of quirky indie titles, E3 2013 proved that game developers are leveraging the resources of next-generation consoles to raise the bar for interactive entertainment. Here are the 50 games at the show that impressed us the most.



Titanfall

Respawn's next-gen debut makes waves

"I left everything behind. Hell, getting here was just the beginning. You said it would be tough to start over, but I didn't listen."

These words are spoken by a grizzled mech pilot during Titanfall's trailer, but they could've been said by Respawn CEO Vince Zampella. After a messy falling out with Activision over the Call of Duty series, the ex-Infinity Ward boss started a new company, staffing half his team with former employees. Eyes have been on Respawn to see how Zampella and crew fare without Activision and a household brand name. We partnered with Respawn to shed light on its new science-fiction shooter in last month's cover story, but this E3 was the studio's initial proving grounds. So far, Respawn is flourishing with its newfound freedom.

Microsoft noticed, and it needed something to brag about following weeks of confusion and alarm due to its murky Xbox One messaging. The company reversed its stance on used-game restrictions and a persistent Internet connection shortly after E3, but during the show the Xbox One was the bad guy. Without much good will on its side, Microsoft's next-gen exclusives played a crucial role during its press conference. Xbox One titles like Dead Rising 3 and Quantum Break look promising, but closing the show with Titanfall grabbed gamers' attention.

The multiplayer-only FPS drops players in the boots of titan pilots, lithe soldiers that free-run

across vast battlefields and control towering mechs. The mechanical titans control more fluidly than the stiff robots of other mech games, staying true to the pitch-perfect controls players expect from the former Infinity Ward developers. These warzones are brought to life with dramatic orbital drops, NPC soldiers, and bonus epilogue exfiltration missions. One moment you're wall-running along billboards and leaping on enemy titans, the next you're piloting one of the titans and squishing foes underfoot. The variety and scale these weaponized metal suits bring to battles look like a much-needed shot in

the arm for the shooter genre.

Solo-minded players may bemoan the concept of forced multiplayer matches, but Respawn is fusing its inventive man vs. mech gameplay with a high spectacle single-player feel. Titan pilots are briefed as they prepare for battle in a spaceship orbiting the planet, which also acts as a matchmaking lobby. The match begins with a faster-than-light leap and an airdrop onto the warzone. A ranking officer commands his troops from within the belly of his giant titan, its big mechanical arms gesturing along with him as he points towards the frontlines.

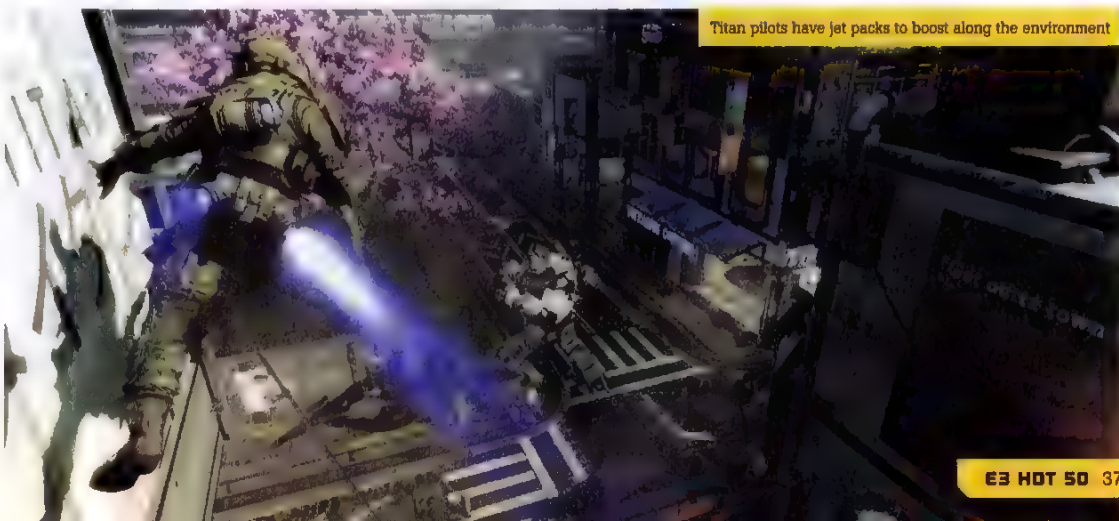
Platform
Xbox One
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Shooter
(Online TBA)

Publisher
Electronic Arts

Developer
Respawn Entertainment

Release
Spring



Titan pilots have jet packs to boost along the environment

When the battle is over, a gigantic ship comes crashing toward the surface in flames, delivering the blockbuster feel Respawn's developers became known for with the Call of Duty series. Titanfall appears to be an organic hybrid of everything that makes modern shooters fun, both online and off.

During E3, Titanfall's ambition attracted the attention of Nintendo legend Shigeru Miyamoto and master filmmaker Stephen Spielberg (who is producing Microsoft's live-action Halo series). These visionaries were spotted visiting Respawn's booth for behind-closed-doors demonstrations. "We're huge fans of them so it was really exciting," says

Respawn community manager Abbie Heppe. "It's always cool to have people you respect come check out what you're working on."

We spoke more with Heppe on how Respawn felt about Titanfall's reception at E3.

"The moment before the Microsoft press conference had to be the most surreal moment," Heppe says. "All the secrecy was ending, we didn't know what the response would be like, and we were pushing Titanfall out into the world for the first time. I think some people got choked up. The whole team was watching in our conference room and aggressively refreshing Twitter. We spent such a long time not being able to talk about the game, that moment before it becomes real is really overwhelming."

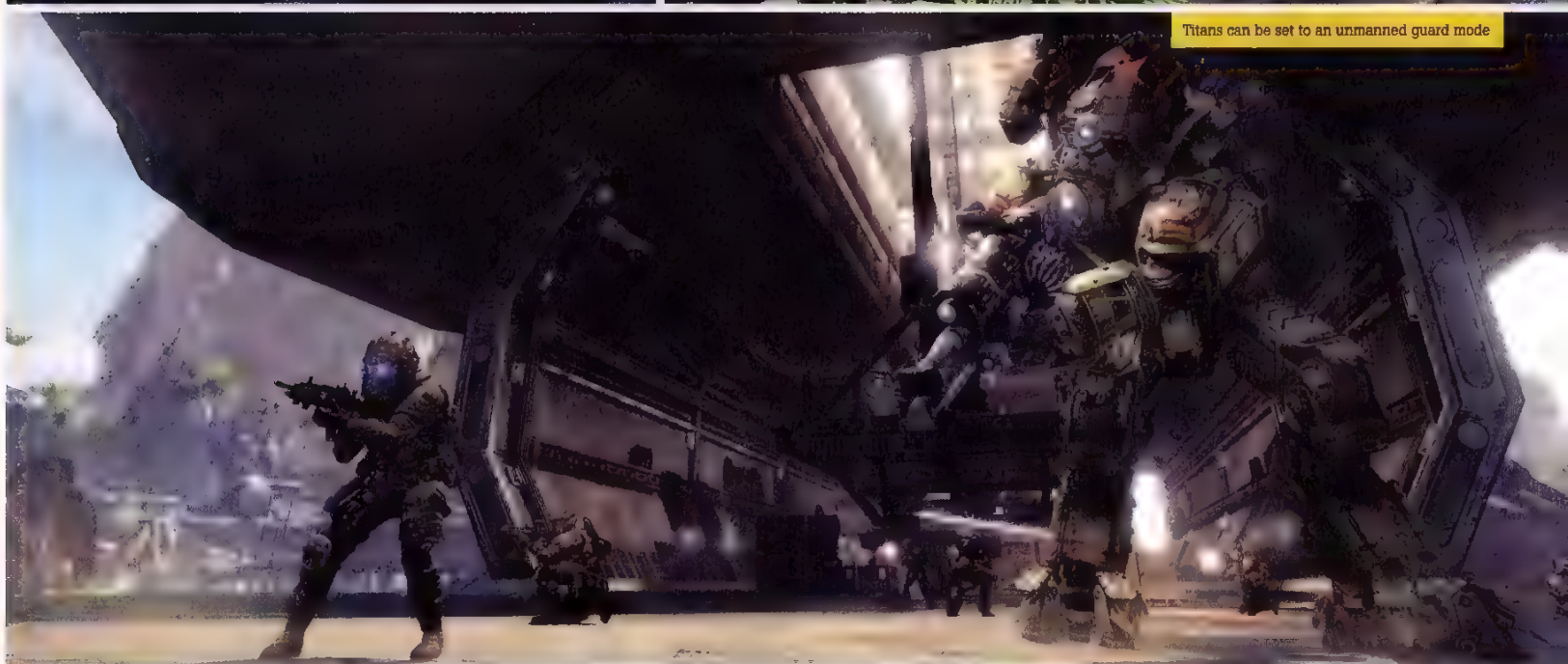
With third-party publisher Electronic Arts backing Titanfall, Respawn could release the game on the PlayStation 4 assuming their exclusivity deal with Microsoft has a limited window. We asked Heppe about whether Sony fans should look forward to Titanfall, and she didn't say "no."

"There wouldn't be a [PS4] version shortly after the Xbox One launch," says Heppe. "Right now

we're completely focused on Xbox and PC and making those versions as perfect as possible. It's not just the capabilities of the hardware, it's also that we have a small team and we want to make sure our first game gets all the focus and support it deserves."

While Xbox One and PC are the targeted platforms for this next-gen title, a 360 version is in development as well. Respawn is harnessing the power of cloud servers to outsource AI scripting and physics systems, so we're curious how this 360 version will stack up to the new IP's grand multiplayer premise.

No matter what next-gen system you play it on, Titanfall's multiplayer-only formula could open the door for other shooter franchises to merge single-player set pieces with engaging competitive matches. Titanfall stands out in a market that's crowded with gritty shooters and giant robots, and earns its spot as our game of the show. Given the consistent success Zampella and his team have had with past shooters, this is shaping up to be the multiplayer experience to look forward to next generation. » Tim Turi



Titans can be set to an unmanned guard mode



Gunplay looks similar to Call of Duty



A glimpse at the scale of Titanfall's maps



Destiny

Bungie pulls back the curtain

02



Platform
PlayStation 4
Xbox One
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

Style
1-Player Shooter
(Multiplayer TBA)

Publisher
Activision

Developer
Bungie

Release
2014

While other games may have been bigger surprises, no other titles at this year's E3 were as anticipated as Bungie's first post-Halo effort. We've known about Destiny for several months now, but we finally got a glimpse of the gameplay at the show. The action looks to combine the tight and story-driven shooter experience players know from Halo, but add in the role-playing-esque powers and weapon upgrades of Borderlands and the large player counts of an MMO. Destiny is an ambitious game.

The demo opens on a desolate scene of Earth many years from now, in the ruins of what was once Russia. Monstrous creatures called

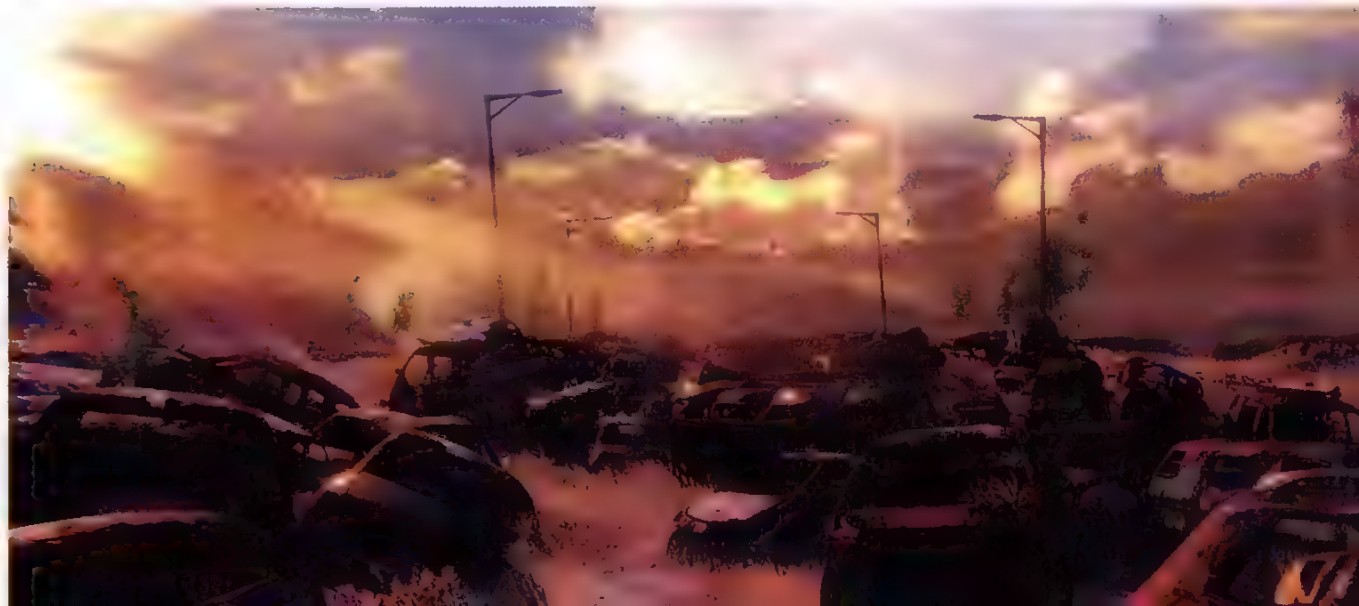
the Fallen leap onto the hulks of ruined cars. A floating dropship drops off a single warrior – a guardian. Each player builds and customizes their own guardian, including selecting a class. Bungie showed off three of the included classes at the show. Hunters specialize in reconnaissance, armored titans wear devastating suits of mechanical armor, and warlocks bolster their arsenal with spells.

As the gameplay demo continues, a second player joins, and the two partners head out together to cross underneath a towering wall. The first-person presentation reveals a visual display that looks similar to what fans are familiar with from Bungie's earlier work on Halo.

A selection of weapons and ammo count is visible in one corner, and a motion-tracking radar appears in the upper left.

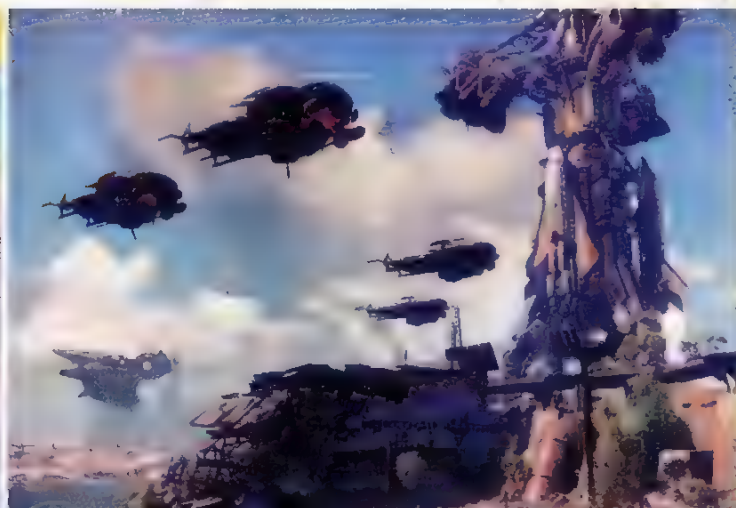
The players enter a darkened area, and one of them triggers his ghost, a floating flashlight entity that moves independently. The comparison to Cortana is unmistakable – it's clear that a character's ghost is meant to act as a guiding hand and narrative tool, but unlike Cortana, your ghost moves on its own and is more active in aiding the player moment to moment.

As the team moves further in to the wall's interior, they engage squads of the nomadic Fallen, one of several revealed enemy types. Other announced foes include the towering,





The Fallen are one of several distinct alien species that players encounter



rhino-like Cabal aliens and the time-traveling robotic race called the Vex. However, in the battle that ensues beneath the wall, only the Fallen show up. Even amongst this one group, it's clear Bungie has carved out a number of sub-types, including a named mini-boss that the two soldiers blast away at with gun and spell. After the fight, one of the partners is able to revive his fallen comrade, and then both Guardians take time to gather up loot and customize new weapons.

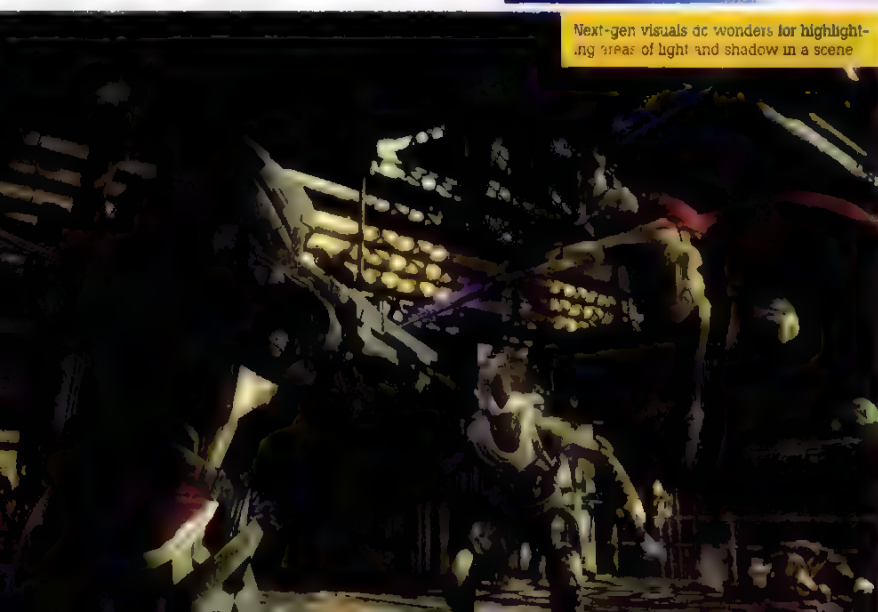
Upon reaching the far side of the wall, the players witness a massive explosion in the distance as a ship warps into the air over a nearby city, shattering buildings in the shockwave of arrival. This signals the beginning of a public event, where numerous players converge on the location to fight off waves of enemy troops, including a massive armored mech called a Devil Walker. The many players engaged in the fight slowly knock away at the spider-like mech, until it finally explodes in a burst.

Destiny is only at the beginning of what will undoubtedly be a long and carefully structured roll-out of info prior to release. Few details have been revealed about the upgrade system, storytelling, outer-space travel, the scope of multiplayer, or the nature of the persistent game world. Nonetheless, this early glimpse has catalyzed Bungie fans. Destiny is one of the landmark titles to watch, and a test case for how willing console players are to engage with an always-online world. — Matt Miller

The game includes larger enemies that often require multiple players to bring down



Next-gen visuals do wonders for highlighting areas of light and shadow in a scene



03



Battlefield 4

DICE turns the destructibility back up to 11

Platform
PlayStation 4
Xbox One
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Shooter
[64-Player Online
[PS4, Xbox One, PC],
24-Player [PS3, 360]]

Publisher
Electronic Arts

Developer
DICE

Release
October 29
[PS3, 360, PC]
TBA
[Xbox One, PS4]

Battlefield 3 is the most successful game in the franchise's long and storied history, but for fans of Bad Company 2 it lacked one critical element that has made DICE the standard bearer for multiplayer design: a proper level of destructibility. Sure, you could shoot through upholstery in the Close Quarters map pack and destroy apartment walls with rocket launchers, but what

happened to leveling buildings? Battlefield 4 answered this call with gusto during its multiplayer demo at E3.

In the center of the Siege of Shanghai conquest map stands a skyscraper control point. Players can take an elevator to the top of the building to seize control, but if the other team is struggling to capture it they can concentrate fire on the building's foundation and bring

the entire structure down. In the dusty aftermath, the control point is found in the rubble. Each map in Battlefield 4 features this type of dynamic game-changing destruction, which DICE has labeled "Levolution." Not every building can be turned into rubble, which executive producer Patrick Bach says is a design decision rather than a technical limitation, but expect more large-scale destruction overall.





DICE is making a concerted effort to create more amphibious maps

Destructibility comes in smaller packages as well. During the E3 demo a soldier blew out an underground pillar in the subway to collapse the road above, which rendered a tank immobile. We also saw plenty of the micro-destruction first introduced in the Close Quarters map pack, with signs, windows, and drywall being shredded by bullets.

The amped-up destruction is only one of the Battlefield 4's impressive features coming to multiplayer. For the first time, console owners get to experience 64-player battles at a silky 60 frames per second – provided you are playing on Xbox One or PlayStation 4. Two more players can get in on the action from the sidelines as well thanks to the return of a feature we haven't seen since Battlefield 2.

Back by popular demand, Commander mode returns for Battlefield 4. Rather than taking a role in the field, the command-

ers serve as an eye in the sky, coordinating attacks by issuing orders to squad leaders and scanning areas with a UAV. When squads follow their orders, both the commander and squad members are rewarded with XP. Commanders can then spend this XP to provide supply drops and vehicles for their troops. As teams capture more control points in conquest, commanders also gain access to increasingly lethal attacks like artillery and tomahawk missiles. You can play Commander mode from PC, consoles, and tablets.

To round out its feature set, Battlefield 4 includes a spectator mode, deeper class/vehicle progression, and an improved Battlelog on consoles that brings it up to par with the PC version. The depth and breadth of these features adds up to the most promising multiplayer game of 2013. » Matt Bertz



As they gain XP, commanders can spend it to drop in ammo, med packs, and vehicles to their troops





Disney Infinity

This is one deep toy box

Platform
Wii U
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • Wii
3DS • PC

Style
1 or 2-Player Action
(4-Player Online)

Publisher
Disney
Interactive
Studios

Developer
Avalanche
Software

Release
August 18

No, this isn't a production error. Disney Infinity cracked our top five list. The company's bold gaming initiative combines traditional licensed games with collectable toys. That alone puts it superficially in par with Activision's Skylanders series. What really elevates the experience is its expansive Toy Box mode, which puts powerful game-creation tools in kids' hands – or lets them just race Lightning McQueen against a hoverboard-mounted Tonto.

I'd seen demos of the Toy Box mode before, but they were largely videos that showed examples of what the guys at Avalanche Software created. The results were impressive and looked fun – recreations of classic Mario Kart tracks, a surprisingly faithful reproduction of the old Ivan "Ironman" Stewart's Super Off Road arcade game, and a passable Donkey Kong – but I didn't understand how easily I could transfer my own ideas onto the screen.

We started off with an empty stadium. A few button presses later, soccer goals appear in their appropriate spots. A ball joins them, along with the underlying game behavior. Your

character inhabits the world of the Toy Box during this kind of creation, so Buzz Lightyear hops around the stadium while zapping props with a magic wand. Players can then chain items together. For instance, if you zap the ball and then the goal, you can specify that a point is scored when the ball enters its boundaries. Then you can add in a scoreboard, chain that to the goal, and have it visually display the score. Deeper levels exist beyond those immediately logical steps; you can have the score increase in different increments, for instance.

In about two minutes of work, we've created a fully functional soccer game. Two players can run around, bopping a large ball around. When a goal is scored, a fireworks display goes off, and a section of the crowd (which we chose) makes cheering sounds. This little soccer sandbox is fully functional, yes, but also pretty boring. We drill into the menus and add big pinball flippers on either side of each goal, and a few pinball bumpers as well. For good measure, we chuck in a few enemy-spawners that activate when

the ball rolls over designated areas. The finished product is a little chaotic, but that was the intent.

Adding and removing props and other items – and even camera placement – was quick and easy, which looks to keep prototyping from becoming a laborious slog. That should keep kids (and adults) from getting too frustrated when their next great idea isn't as great as they'd hoped.

In addition to props like goals and balls, the Toy Box holds a variety of blocks and other basic shapes. These stackable components are also physics objects, meaning that players can build their own version of an Angry Birds-style game or have castle-versus-castle battles.

Players who aren't inclined to mess around with these game-creation tools are welcome to play through specially designed Toy Box missions or simply roam around with their buddies making up games on the fly. Disney will allow players to upload their favorite creations and will then curate the best that the community has to offer. » Jeff Cork



Characters in Disney Infinity are stylized to visually fit within the same world



Here, the Lone Ranger has to protect this speeding train

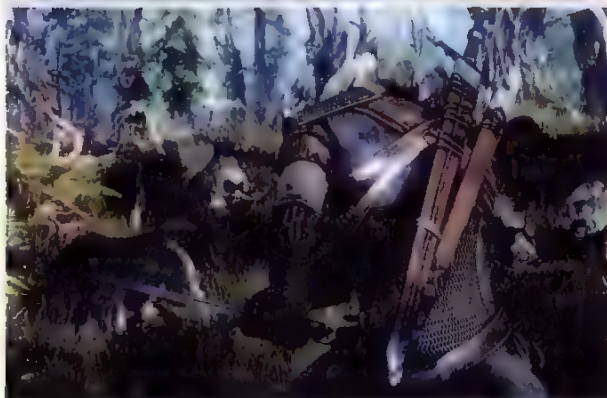


How can anything beat Jack Sparrow on a bike?

05

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

Geralt embarks on his biggest adventure yet



Platform
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

Style
1-Player
Role-Playing

Publisher
TBA

Developer
CD Projekt RED

Release
2014

The Witcher series offers a different experience than other fantasy RPGs like Skyrim. Previous games in the series have featured some of the best storytelling and characters in recent years, complemented by a robust and challenging combat system. For its next-gen sequel, CD Projekt RED is moving the adventure to a massive open world full of enough side quests and monsters to keep a witcher in business for the foreseeable future.

The Witcher 3 tasks Geralt with tracking down the titular Wild Hunt, an army of spectral warriors laying waste to towns across the land. However, our hands-off demo doesn't take us very far down the critical path. After speaking with a survivor who tips Geralt off to the Wild Hunt's whereabouts, the witcher is asked to solve another mystery. Something from the nearby forest has been killing townsfolk of the village, including our unfortunate new friend's brother.

Geralt investigates the murder using his new witcher sense, which allows the monster hunter to spot details in his surroundings similarly to Batman's detective vision in the recent Arkham games. After scouring the woods, Geralt comes to the conclusion that the culprit is a leshen, a mystical tree-like beast. However, the townsfolk are split on how to handle the problem; the village elders don't want to meddle with the creature, while the younger residents are eager to pay Geralt for his monster-slaying services. The player is free to finesse either side to his or her liking; the representative for CD Projekt RED chooses to encourage the younger inhabitants for a pay day, and returns to the forest to slay the beast.

The leshen puts up a formidable fight, requiring Geralt to find and destroy three totems that feed the monster's power while avoiding its attacks in the process. CD Projekt RED says Witcher 3 contains over 80 such creatures, each with unique characteristics and attacks. Defeating the monster breaks its curse, transforming the forest into a more hospitable place – but Geralt's actions carry unforeseen consequences back at the village. We won't spoil what happens, but Witcher fans have a good idea of the life-or-death

consequences the player's choices carry in the series.

This small and completely optional side quest is even more impressive considering the staggering amount of content the team has planned for players; the developer says the game world is 35 times larger than The Witcher 2, and provides 100 hours of gameplay. If the rest of the story offers the same level of quality we've seen so far, Skyrim fans may have another RPG series to anticipate in 2014. » Jeff Marchiafava



Killing this leshen requires first finding and destroying three forest totems that give the beast its power



Batman: Arkham Origins

Investigating Batman's enhanced detective skills

Batman: Arkham Origins features a younger version of our hero just two years into his vigilante career. Thanks to his youthful ambition and a cave filled with secret technology, the master detective has keener sleuthing skills than seen in Rocksteady's previous games. During an E3 2013 demonstration, developer Warner Bros. Montreal showed off a new ability that allows Batman to play back crimes while exploring the environment to find clues.

Batman is gliding across rooftops toward the Gotham Royal Hotel for an encounter with Joker when a police chopper cuts him off. The cops view Batman as a threat at this point in his career, so facing off with a Gotham PD chopper is a big deal. Something clips

the helicopter's tail propeller, causing it to crash into the side of the building as the pilot screams, "Mayday!" Being the upright hero he is, Batman investigates the crash.

Batman taps into the power of the Batcomputer back at the Batcave to digitally reconstruct the crime. A button tap initiates the evidence scanner, which highlights the dead pilot thrown from the accident. Holding down another button rewinds the crash. The camera follows the tailless chopper as it wobbles off the ground in reverse, pausing at the point in the air where the rear propeller clipped the building. Scrubbing through the virtual crime scene with the shoulder buttons reveals that the severed tail flew onto a nearby rooftop. Inspecting the mangled helicopter

chunk reveals that a high-powered rifle round caused the accident.

Now when Batman rewinds the crash, a laser sight is seen aimed at the aircraft. He traces the beam back to a nearby skyscraper. Batman uses his grappling hook to scale the building and investigate the source of the laser: a SWAT member. Further analysis shows the police sniper wasn't aiming at his comrade's chopper. Batman was in his sights. The SWAT member was killed by the same bullet that took down the helicopter, via an impressive ricochet off the wall behind him. The Caped Crusader immediately recognizes the fatal shot as Deadshot's handiwork.

The rest of the demo is filled with the Arkham series' trademark attack/counter-attack combat, a new gadget that tethers enemies and objects together, and martial-artist enemies that counter Batman's moves. The new detective gameplay appears to be Batman: Arkham Origin's biggest innovation to the popular franchise so far, which isn't a bad thing considering the solid core formula.

—Tim Turi

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360
Wii U • PC

Style
1-Player Action

Publisher
Warner Bros.
Interactive

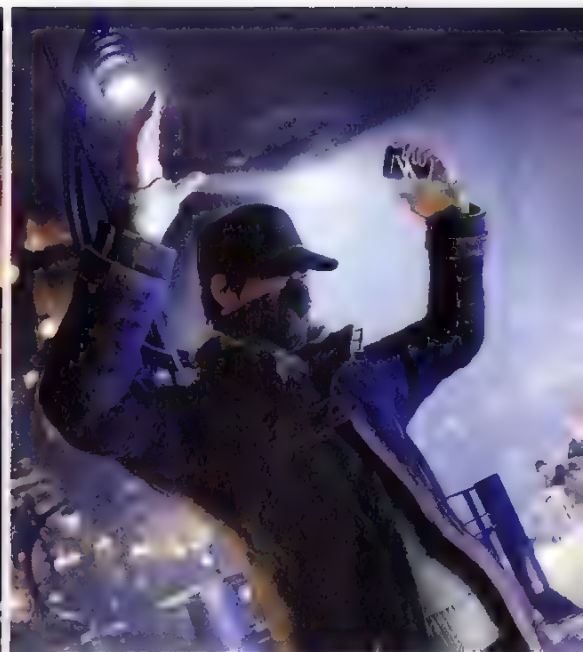
Developer
Warner Bros.
Montreal

Release
October 25



A new gadget lets Batman tether enemies together, or in this instance, an explosive barrel and a thug





Watch Dogs

Life in an always-online world

Platform

PlayStation 4
Xbox One • Wii U
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style

1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBA)

Publisher

Ubisoft

Developer

Ubisoft
Montreal

Release

November 19
(PS3, 360, Wii U, PC),
TBA
(PS4, Xbox One)

As one of the few next-generation titles revealed at last year's E3, Watch Dogs had many gamers' attention by default. This year, with new hardware and next-gen software around every corner, Ubisoft put more effort into making Watch Dogs stand out, and it shows. By showcasing the near-future city of Chicago and a high degree of player freedom, Watch Dogs kept its status as one of the stars of E3.

Watch Dogs tells the story of Aiden Pearce, an antihero hacker in a city that is constantly connected. Aiden's main weapon is information. He uses his phone to control computer systems, security cameras, and personal cell phones. Once he gains access, he can

manipulate the devices to suit his agenda. The hacking mechanic isn't just a gimmick peppered throughout the main story missions; Watch Dogs is an open-world game, and hacking the system defines nearly every aspect of how you interact with your surroundings.

Before you have total control of a particular area of the city, you need to take down a local communication center. This installs a backdoor into the Central Operating System (CIOS) for the area, giving you free rein over just about everything with a computer. Communications centers are strategically important and well-guarded, but even though Aiden is proficient with firearms and hand-to-hand combat, going in with guns blazing is a

mistake. Instead, you need to infiltrate using a balance of aggression and subterfuge. Hack a gate's controls to create a distraction. Look through security cameras to monitor patrol routes. Sneak up on inattentive guards and take them down silently. If the stealth options go awry, you can resort to firearms, but that style of play doesn't highlight what makes Watch Dogs cool or unique.

Once the backdoor is installed, various other activities become available. Aiden can profile individual citizens as they walk by, perusing sensitive information like sexual fetishes and criminal histories. He can hack into vehicles, which serve as decent hiding spots as well as transportation. He also has access to an



Making the environment respond to your wishes happens quickly; you don't need to go through any hacking minigame to make these pylons rise up to stop Aiden's pursuer

07



Like most open-world games, getting around involves a mix of vehicle and on-foot travel. And, of course, high-speed chases

extensive network of security cameras that the oppressing forces in the city use to keep tabs on the populace. These cameras are good for more than observation; in one case, Aiden hacks into a home webcam, peering into an empty living room. He has the opportunity to steal bank account information from this perspective, but the sounds of a baby crying in

the other room deter him. When you're holding the controller, you can choose to be less benevolent and rob the family instead.

Though he strikes from the shadows with technology, Aiden isn't immune to his own tactics. Watch Dogs has an innovative take on open-world multiplayer, allowing other players to enter your world unannounced and attempt

to hack you. In my demo, Aiden is just walking down the street when a message appears saying that he is being hacked by another player. The offender is nearby, and Aiden has a limited amount of time to find the hacker, interrupt the process, and (for a bonus) eliminate the other individual. This results in a tense game of cat-and-mouse, with the hacker hiding and hoping to run down the clock, and the potential for a frantic chase and thrilling getaway depending on how events play out. The fact that these sequences pop up unpredictably could be a source of adrenaline for some, but players who don't want to be interrupted by others can always just turn off the multiplayer component.

For the last year, we've been seeing trailers and demos that build up the fiction behind Watch Dogs, set up the story, and establish Aiden as the protagonist. The most impressive thing about what Ubisoft showed at this E3 is the way it shows a slice of the moment-to-moment gameplay. In an open-world game, you only engage in so many crucial story missions; most of your time is spent participating in the fun things that pop up in the world around you. Watch Dogs has plenty of those diversions to entertain you, and it is approaching them with a unique angle that adds a technological edge to the sandbox.

» Joe Juba





The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds

Link's nostalgic trip to the past

Platform
3DS
Style
1-Player Action
Publisher
Nintendo
Developer
Nintendo
Release
November

A Link to the Past is receiving a sequel over 20 years after its original release, and all signs point to it being a fantastic love letter to the game for existing fans while remaining accessible and fun for newcomers. We played it at E3 and came away impressed with this throwback to Link's roots.

All of A Link Between Worlds' environments and characters are based on the art style of the SNES original, and the soundtrack consists of well-done remakes of classic tunes. Everything looks fantastic, and the retro-inspired style looks far better in motion than it comes across in screenshots.

A Link Between Worlds' overworld differs slightly from A Link to the Past, but most large sections and landmarks are in the same place. Link's house is still in the middle of the map, and the demo led me to the Eastern Palace in the same dusty location that it occupied on

Super Nintendo. Pots, rocks, and plants are in different locations, and some enemies behave differently. For example, Link is no longer electrified when he strikes a Buzz Blob with his sword.

One of the most significant tweaks to the gameplay is the omission of the standard magic meter. Instead of a finite magic reserve that has to be refilled, A Link Between Worlds features a recharging energy meter. In the E3 demo, this meter dictated how often I could shoot arrows, swing my hammer, or toss flames from my fire rod.

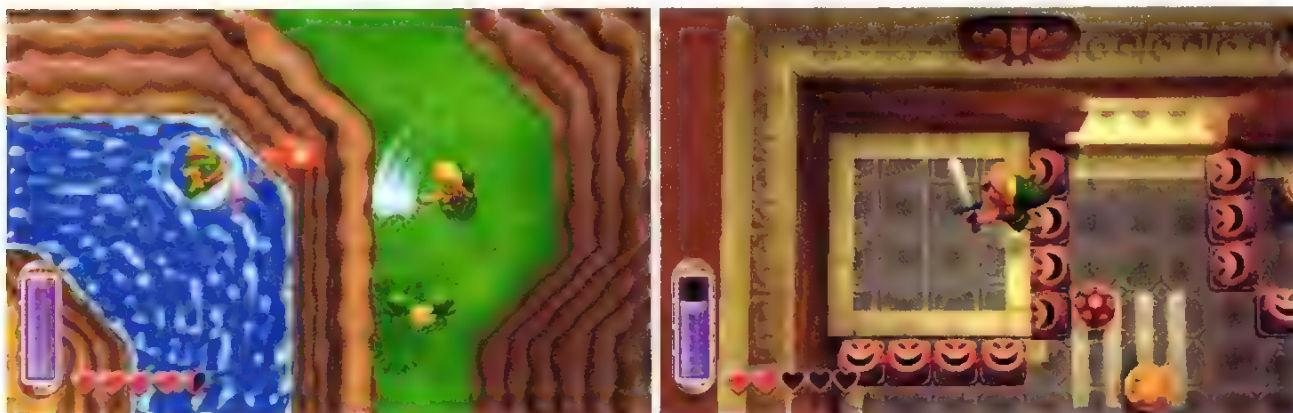
Another new addition is also regulated by the energy meter. Link can now press against walls and become a flat, graffiti-like version of himself. While in this form, he can sneak around in the walls and access areas that would be otherwise unavailable. In the dungeon available in the demo, this ability came in handy several

times during some clever puzzle segments involving moving platforms.

At the end of my demo, I once again encountered the worm-like Moldorm from A Link To the Past. The fight played out just as it did in 1992, tasking Link with striking the tail of the wriggling beast until it was destroyed. After a few strikes of my sword and a well-placed arrow, Moldorm exploded and I was rewarded with a heart piece.

I've been excited about A Link Between Worlds since its original announcement, but I'm far more confident in this sequel after spending time with it. It seems to strike all the right nostalgic notes, but new features like the energy bar and 2D wall sections make the action feel fresh. Longtime Zelda fans and younger gamers alike should find plenty to like when this 3DS title releases in November.

» Dan Ryckert



Need For Speed Rivals

Cleaning up the streets, one crash at a time

09



Racing fans had plenty of options at this year's E3, but while titles like Forza 5, Gran Turismo 6, and DriveClub offered up sterile single-player demos to attendees, Need For Speed Rivals thrilled players with its cops-versus-racers action.

Need For Speed Rivals doesn't offer players a ton of new innovations, but instead hones the addictive formula of Criterion's Need For Speed Most Wanted. Players take on the role of either a racer or a cop. Racers cruise

through the sprawling open world of Redview County and engage in impromptu races and competitions with other racers. Cops hunt down racers and smash them off the road in the name of the law. As a gamer who spends most of my time in racing games on the guardrails, I chose to be a cop during our team-based multiplayer demo.

After a few minutes of patrolling Redview County's city streets, I was taking down illegal street racers in style, using a variety of shock waves and roadblocks to my advantage.

Racers have their own gadgets for evading the police, but my team jumped to an early lead, earning a healthy amount of speed points with every successful bust. However, racers have an interesting risk/reward system at their disposal; while they also acquire speed points by drifting and taking down competitors, completing races increases their score multiplier. This offers racers an advantage, but they must also stop at hideouts to bank their score, and cops can steal their points by taking them down first.

Eventually the opposing team made a comeback, proving themselves more adept at staying on the road than we were. However, our stinging defeat did little to diminish the thrill of chasing after high-value targets and narrowly avoiding head-on collisions (or causing them, as the case may be), and the game looked great running on next-gen hardware.

EA emphasized Need For Speed Rivals' new AllDrive feature during its press conference, which aims to blend single-player, co-op, and competitive play into one complete package by seamlessly placing friends in the same instance of the game world and offering them dynamic objectives when other players are nearby. If AllDrive facilitates the same competitive spirit as our hands-on demo, we'll be happy to get behind the wheel again this winter. » Jeff Marchiafava

Platform
PlayStation 4
Xbox One
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Racing
(Multiplayer TBA)

Publisher
Electronic Arts

Developer
Ghost Games

Release
November 19
(PS3, 360, PC)
TBA
(PS4, Xbox One)

Ghost Games says plenty of car customization will be available to players, but didn't go into any detail



The Walking Dead: 400 Days

Toying with your emotions yet again

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player
Adventure

Publisher
Telltale Games

Developer
Telltale Games

Release
July

Ean't get enough of The Walking Dead? Finding the wait for season two excruciating? Telltale wants to keep giving you torturous decisions and shocking moments in its bridging episode, 400 Days. A showing at E3 suggests that 400 Days is right on track to follow in season one's illustrious footsteps.

My apprehension is high as I step into Telltale's booth for a showing of 400 Days. The Walking Dead is such a wonderfully crafted tale, but what if it's a one-hit wonder? What if the developers overplay the drama to the point where it doesn't feel natural?

As soon as the demo starts, my worries melt away. Intensity, shock, and emotional pull all greet me within moments. Telltale's 400 Days focuses on five new characters and spans from day one all the way through 400 of the zombie apocalypse.

Vince's story begins and immediately reminds me of the morally gray Lee Everett. We first see Vince pointing a gun at a man pleading for his life. We don't know why Vince is in this position, but it's hard not to cringe as he pulls the trigger. With a loud bang, Vince is on the run, and the next time he comes on screen, he's in an orange jumpsuit on a bus, shackled to other prisoners. He clearly didn't get away with his crime, but Vince's likeable, open demeanor makes him feel inherently good, similarly to Lee.

During the bus ride, Vince chats with two other prisoners. It starts off light-hearted, and plenty of jokes ensue; one prisoner even muses that he has the "Latin heat you can't resist." But soon the quips about being in prison and becoming someone's girlfriend die down, and the conversation turns to their prison sentences. Vince is questioned about his crime, and you have the opportunity to select a response. Say you were falsely accused, and "Danny noticed that" pops up.



Choose to lie or boast about different things and the conversation takes a moral turn as one prisoner discusses his sentence for sleeping with an underage girl. The tension continues to heat up as a fight breaks out between other prisoners. As one attempts to strangle another, accusatory dialogue and decisions bombard you. Will you step up or sit back? The best part about this whole ordeal is how you're never sure when the climax is coming. Just when

you think things can't get worse, zombies and death make their way into the story.

The character facial expressions are noticeable as the chaos surmounts. You're shackled, and zombies are trying to attack you; how are you going to get out? The choice is difficult and gruesome as you must now choose to align yourself with characters you only met moments ago. You must make the decision quickly, and the consequence actually made me gasp. I'm stunned as I try to take in all the frenzy. Telltale is at its best when it's forcing you to face the harsh realities that come with fighting to survive, and I find myself feeling something for characters that I've only spent 20 minutes with.

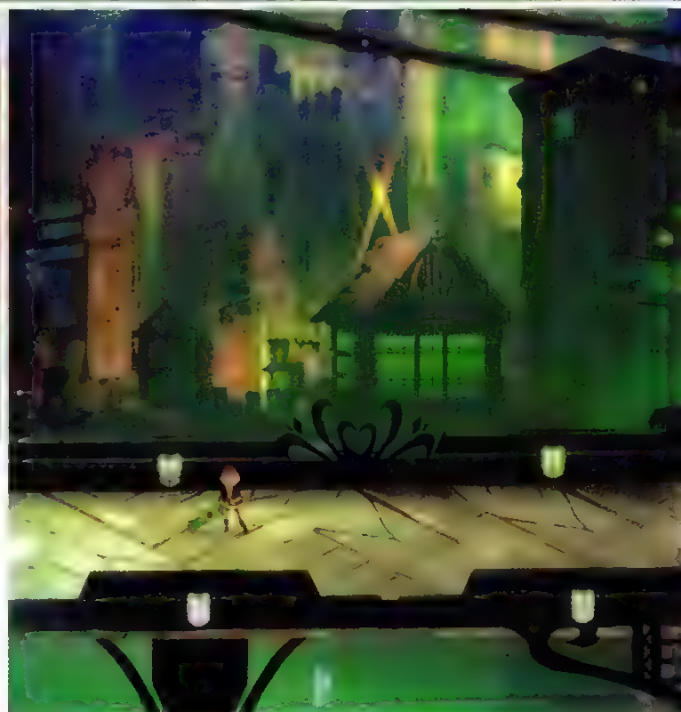
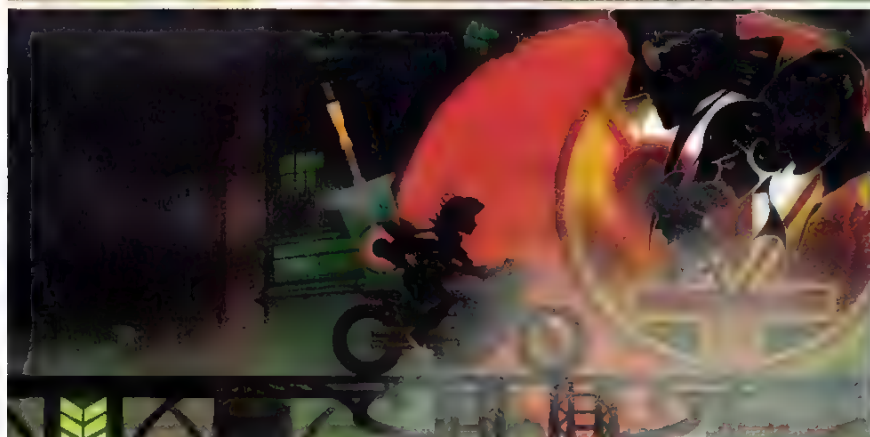
Unattractive choices, moral dilemmas, and unpredictable consequences are The Walking Dead's pull, and they all have a place in 400 Days. Telltale knows how much fans love their decisions to have weight, so choices made in season one will make their way into 400 Days, and what you do in 400 Days impacts season two. Also, expect different days to reflect the progression of time. As the world goes from calm to complete pandemonium, places and mental states follow suit. Stories can be played in any order, allowing you to bounce forward and back in time.

Bridging the gap between season one and two could have felt like Telltale was merely filling in details with this DLC, but from what I saw, it looks like 400 Days will be meaningful in more ways than one. The best part is not knowing who will be a casualty or savior in the unpredictable world, and who knows which characters from 400 Days will appear in season two. That prospect alone is inviting.

» Kimberley Wallace



Who said prison would be easy?



Transistor

The makers of Bastion continue to impress

We've known about Supergiant's sophomore effort for some time, but Sony took advantage of E3 to show Transistor as one of its marquee indie titles coming to PS4. Transistor's in-game narration and vibrant art palate share an obvious kinship with Bastion, but the gameplay moves in some exciting new directions.

Transistor tells the story of Red, a famous singer in the sprawling urban metropolis

called Cloudbank. The increasing numbers of missing people in the city are not her concern, until the threat comes to her doorstep. An assassination attempt leads to the mysterious loss of her recognizable voice, though you'll hear her songs playing throughout the game on recordings. The deadly attack somehow teleports her and the body of her friend and protector to the far fringes of the city, where she is left alone and terrified. Strangely, the sword impaled through her friend seems to have taken on his consciousness and voice, she takes up the weapon – called the Transistor – and sets out to return to the city and find out what's behind the attacks.

Along the way, she runs into robotic enemies called the Process. These foes are intent on recovering the Transistor, and Red's initial battles are against them. Luckily, Red finds other soul remnants called traces scattered throughout the world, and the Transistor can pick them up and gain new abilities through their absorption. These powers map to the face buttons of the controller, and a large

number of these traces appear throughout the game world, so you can customize your play style as you like.

Battles play out in an innovative mix of real-time isometric-view fights with an occasional turn-based option. Every few seconds, players can pause the action and set a queue of several moves and attacks that play out in a high-speed burst of motion. In practice, it's easy to save up these moments of super-powered speed and attacks for clinch situations, where you're surrounded by foes.

Transistor was one of our favorite independent games on display at this year's show. Sony is sending a clear message by courting titles like Transistor to the PS4. Here's hoping the implied promise is maintained as the PS4 launches, and that independent developers like Supergiant Games find a good home on Sony's new console. » Matt Miller

» **Platform**
PlayStation 4 • PC

» **Style**
1-Player
Action

» **Publisher**
Supergiant Games

» **Developer**
Supergiant Games

» **Release**
2014



Players can pause the game and set actions that then unfold in quick succession after unpausing

12



FIFA 14

The beautiful game gets more beautiful

Platform
PlayStation 4
Xbox One

Style
1 to 4-Player Sports
(22-Player Online)

Publisher
EA Sports

Developer
EA Canada

Release
TBA

With over 3.5 billion fans, soccer is unquestionably the most popular sport in the world. Given its prominence on the global stage, it's no surprise that EA Sports is spending a great deal of its resources readying FIFA 14 for its next-gen debut. If my brief time on the pitch at E3 is any indication, it could potentially wipe away all the bad memories of the company's blundered transition to the Xbox 360/PlayStation 3 and usher in another era of dominance.

Though the game is still four months away from being launched on hardware that Sony and Microsoft are still tweaking, EA surprisingly shoved an Xbox One controller in my hand at E3. Taking control of cover athlete Lionel Messi's FC Barcelona against Atlético Madrid, the first thing I notice is the drastic improvement in pageantry.

With poorly detailed crowds that looked more like seas of clones than legions of club supporters, stadiums in previous FIFA games have typically been nothing more than inconsequential cardboard cutouts bordering the action. Rarely have you felt the tension in the air for championship games or the hostility of a match between rivals. To bring the setting alive on next-gen consoles, EA is fully rendering 3D crowds and integrating them into more camera angles to impart a sense of atmosphere. EA says both crowds and players react more realistically to tense moments.

Improved player awareness also extends into the minute-to-minute action on the pitch. Thanks to improvements in player animations and a revamped intelligence system, players move and react more like their real-life counterparts than ever before. In just five minutes of gameplay, I noticed players step over balls, deliver glancing headers, fluidly trap balls, effortlessly step over leg sweeps, and perform 180-degree turns with the grace of modern athletes.

The gameplay doesn't deviate drastically from the conventions set by the current-gen version, but you feel much more in control of your player, and the ball moves with its own determination instead of magnetizing to the intended pass target or marking defender moving in for a turnover. Playing the ball into space seems to be a much more viable strategy, and you can now pass with both the inside and outside of the foot.

EA is honing the shooting mechanic to make it more realistic as well. Players square up to the goal properly by planting their non-shooting foot, and simulated ball physics give shots a natural trajectory with more curvature. If you put a ball into play in the goal box, you may notice a more frenzied scramble for possession. Now up to four players can jostle for a header, and users must perfectly time their

headers to get a shot off. Tapping the shot button results in a glancing header, which you can aim anywhere at the net. Holding down the button gives you a power header.

Another version of FIFA 14 is coming to PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC on September 24. The new features that have us excited for the next-gen edition of the game are absent from those platforms, but as GI's reigning sports game of the year, the current-gen versions can still hold their own.

You never get a true sense of how improved a sports game is until you spend quality time playing it, but the early returns on FIFA 14 are certainly favorable. EA's latest ode to footy was the darling sports game of E3, and we're curious to learn what four more months of tuning can do for the series' leap into next-gen. » Matt Bertz

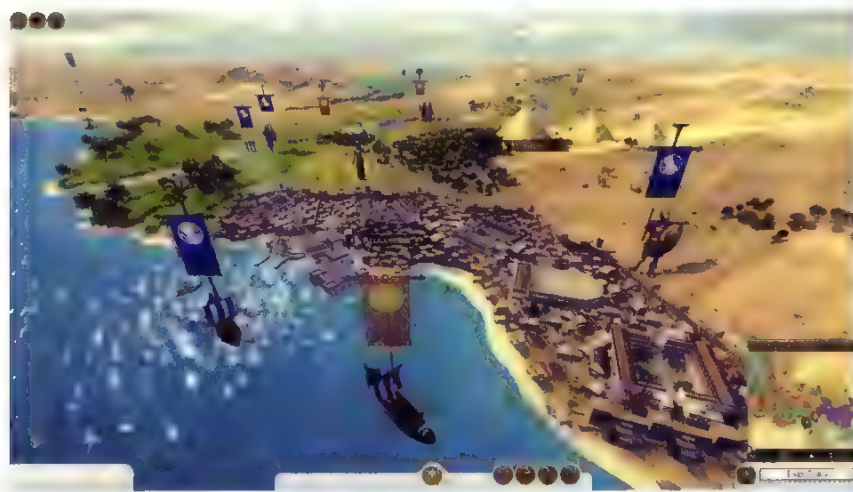


With fully rendered 3D crowds, EA Sports hopes to amp the pageantry of major soccer matches

Total War: Rome II

Build an empire without tedious micromanagement

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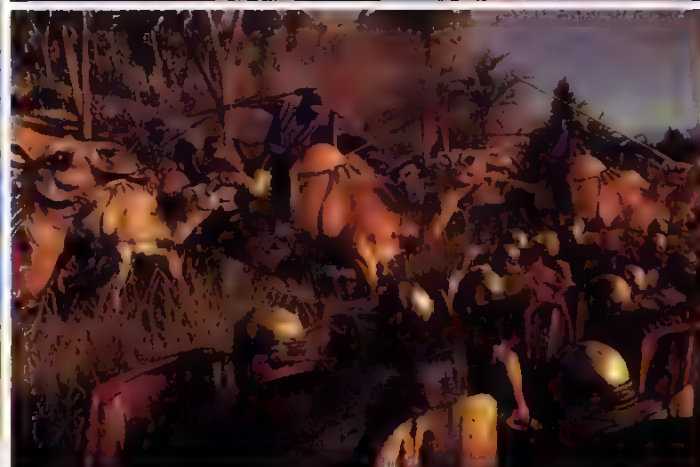
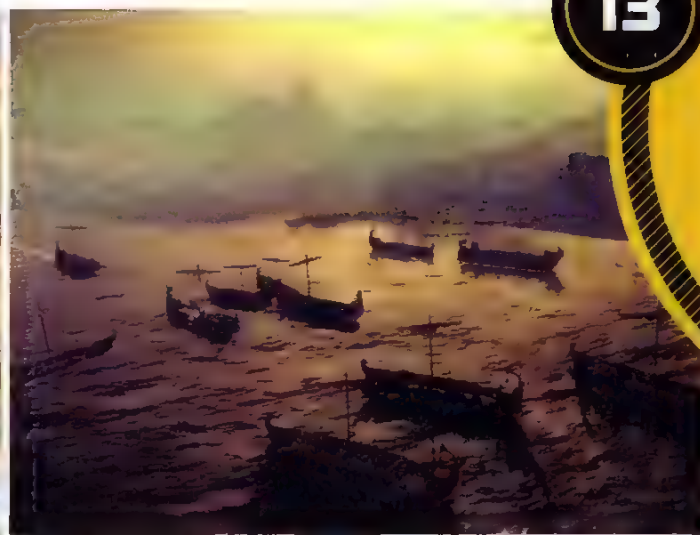


Creative Assembly's award-winning Total War games rightfully generate headlines for their large-scale real-time strategy battles, but as a longtime fan of the series I have a confession to make. I occasionally orchestrate the clash of swords and stampede of cavalry, but I prefer the challenge of managing my empire from afar. Though I am drawn more to the grand strategy than the granular military tactics, the diplomatic relations in Total War games are often mired in questionable decision-making from rival factions. When I married off a daughter to the Venetians to improve relations with them while playing Medieval, for instance, they immediately marched across the Alps to attack my nearest city. Some wedding gift.

Since political intrigue is one of the most alluring aspects of the Roman era, it's fitting that Creative Assembly is revisiting the foundations of its diplomacy system for Rome II. When playing as the Romans in the grand campaign (one of nine playable factions), you must declare your allegiance to one of the three great Roman houses – the Julia, Cornelia, and Junia. As you fight for the Roman public's favor, you may deem it necessary to expend political capital to diminish the influence of your rival houses. If a particular

devotee to another house is giving you trouble in the Senate, you could extort him, discredit him, or even attempt an assassination. Spending this political capital wisely could go a long way toward keeping your affairs at home in order while you're out expanding the borders of the empire.

As you come up against other countries in your quest to conquer the known world, recognizing when to form alliances and march to battle is essential. Rome carries over and cleans up the relations meter from Shogun 2, which gives you a cursory glance of how your past actions have shaped a rival country's attitude toward you. If you've committed acts of atrocity against one of their rivals, this may please them slightly despite its general unpleasantness, which is demonstrated with a slight numerical boost. This minor bit of good will could be irrevocably damaged, however, if you march your military through their territory without clearing it first, which could result in a large negative numerical value. Surfacing how these perceptions level out to inform a country's decision making should go a long way toward helping you anticipate a response toward a trade agreements, peace treaties, or military alliances, which was a problem in the original Rome game.



Alongside the transparent diplomacy comes news that you can now achieve victory conditions for the grand campaign in other ways than smashing your sandal heel on the throats of your enemies. If you prefer to expand your influence by dominating economic trade or expanding the reach of your culture, these are also acceptable approaches.

To ease the burden of empire management, Creative Assembly is also streamlining city state governance and changing the way you recruit troops. Now all of your bureaucratic policies can be set from the provincial capital. Troop recruitment happens directly within the legion instead of having to create troops at a city and march them to the frontline. The types of units you can recruit depend on where you are in the world. On home soil you can enlist any kind of soldier you have the facilities to create, but if you're deep in enemy territory your options are limited to expensive mercenaries. Each legion can develop traditions over time, which are imparted to anyone who joins its ranks.

Coupling these management improvements to the already jaw-dropping large-scale skirmishes, Total War: Rome II is shaping up to be the must-play strategy game of 2013.

» Matt Bertz

13

Platform
PC

Style
1-Player Strategy
(Online TBA)

Publisher
Sega

Developer
Creative Assembly

Release
September 3

14

Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare

The online battlefield just got adorable

Platform
Xbox One
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Shooter
(Multiplayer TBA)

Publisher
Electronic Arts

Developer
PopCap Games

Release
2014

In an announcement no one saw coming, PopCap took to the stage during EA's E3 press conference to reveal a new third-person multiplayer shooter based on its popular tower defense series. While Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare retains the same goofy humor and charming art style fans know and love, the frenzied action is more akin to Battlefield than the casual games PopCap has worked on in the past.

Our hands-off demo featured Garden Warfare's four-player co-op mode, which pits the series' cheery foliage against waves of the undead. Players can choose between four distinct classes, which should be familiar for online shooter fans. Peashooters are your garden-variety soldiers, while Cacti excel

at long-range sniping, Sunflowers provide medical support, and Chompers are melee-oriented fighters. Each character also features a "rooted" ability, which provides a more powerful attack at the expense of mobility. For instance, the Peashooter's snout temporarily takes the form of a Gatling gun, while Sunflowers can vanquish foes with a blistering sunbeam. Gamers can also play as zombies, though PopCap has yet to share any details on classes or abilities.

Garden Warfare also features some light tower-defense elements; players can purchase potted plants that automatically target and gun down foes, and can lay down traps such as exploding potato mines. My favorite power-up is the garlic drone, which players can remotely

pilot and use to call in corn strikes that explode in a shower of popcorn.

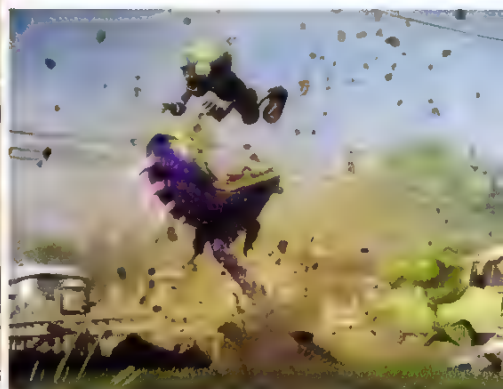
The incoming waves of zombies are broken up by boss battles, which included the ball-spinning Disco zombie and the towering Gargantuar. PopCap says it's mining Plants vs. Zombies' vast library of popular characters, so fans should expect plenty more boss reveals in the future.

Garden Warfare is being developed as a full-fledged multiplayer title, featuring competitive modes in addition to the co-op mode on display at E3. The game's light-hearted action could be the perfect alternative to more violent shooters for younger audiences. Despite the cartoony art style, Garden Warfare's visuals look great in motion, thanks in large part to the power of the Frostbite 3 engine.

Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare is coming to Xbox One, Xbox 360, and PC in the spring of 2014, along with other next-gen systems at a later date. » Jeff Marchiafava



Plants vs. Zombies' lighthearted tone provides a family-friendly alternative to other online shooters





Super Mario 3D World

Mario multiplayer in three dimensions

Nintendo announced a new Mario game for Wii U at E3, but it wasn't another Galaxy title as some had expected. Rather, the company introduced Super Mario 3D World.

This new game is, as the title suggests, similar to Super Mario 3D Land for 3DS. However, in keeping with recent tradition, this Wii U title features four-player multiplayer (with Toad, Peach, and Luigi) similar to New Super Mario Bros. Wii and New Super Mario Bros. U. Like 3D Land, the game blends 3D and 2D gameplay with a variety of camera angles, but plays out mostly from a more panned-out, isometric viewpoint.

As before, the multiplayer adds a bit of chaos to the mix, but you can always catch up with your companions by floating back in a bubble when you die. The levels look to be the expertly designed platforming that we've come to expect (the game is being developed

by the internal Nintendo team responsible for 3D Land and the two Galaxy titles). There are some interesting twists, however. Pipes play a more prominent role and, for the first time, you can see into them. Thanks to clear pipes, you can see how Mario and the gang travel. As it turns out, they don't go feet-first. Instead, the crew travels head-first, similar to Superman flying. These clear pipes also make some new gameplay scenarios possible. You often enter a grid of pipes, sometimes populated with cycling enemies, and use the d-pad to switch paths to avoid danger.

As far as Wii U-specific features, the implementation of the touchpad is fairly minimal. As you would expect, additional multiplayer partners can play using Wii remotes, so there aren't any core game commands that use the touchpad. However, the player who controls the touchpad can touch enemies to stun them for a second, similarly to how the Wii

remote was used in "co-star" mode in Super Mario Galaxy.

The biggest addition to the gameplay is the new cat power, which Nintendo insisted was not a "suit" but a "transformation." This is a power-up like a fire flower, and once you transform into a cat, you can use your agility to perform a "pounce" roll to kill enemies. The most important way in which the cat changes the traditional gameplay is in the ability to climb up the side walls of platforms. It's cool, and will inevitably lead to a host of new secrets and hidden areas. However, it is also limited. After climbing to a certain height, you slide down with your claws.

While it's not a bold new direction for Mario in the way that Galaxy was on Wii, Super Mario 3D World looks to be another great addition to the Mario series. Nintendo's iconic plumber is nothing if not reliable.

» Matt Helgeson

Platform
Wii U

Style
1 to 4-Player
Platforming

Publisher
Nintendo

Developer
Nintendo

Release
December

The Elder Scrolls Online

Expanding onto consoles



Platform

PlayStation 4
Xbox One
PC • Mac

Style

Massively
Multiplayer Online
Role-Playing Game

Publisher

Bethesda Softworks

Developer

Zenimax
Online Studios

Release

Spring

f the PlayStation 3/Xbox 360 generation of games saw some timid steps into console MMO releases, all signs indicate that the next series of consoles is likely to see a stampede of online multiplayer RPGs. The Elder Scrolls Online is helping lead the charge, fueled by the wild popularity of its parent franchise and the recent announcement that it is coming to Xbox One and PlayStation 4 in addition to PC.

The Elder Scrolls Online draws on a number of the features that have been successfully implemented into MMOs the last few years. Extensive voice acting, an action-oriented combat system, and story-based questing combine into a highly playable and accessible experience.

E3 visitors were treated to some hands-on time with the current version of ESO, in which we explored a city that should be familiar to longtime Elder Scrolls fans: Daggerfall. The MMO's setting several thousand years before the other Elder Scrolls games assures that things look a little different, but it's exciting to think about all the familiar locales from previous games that we'll get to visit.

Before diving in, the character creator proves itself to be flexible and robust; more so than many MMOs, building a unique visual look for your character is a breeze. Class choice sets up the style of play you'd like to shoot for, but each class has a broad variety of skills to upgrade, and it doesn't seem like the game is striving for a pure role-based function for each character.

Running around Daggerfall, it's clear that Zenimax Online has gone out of its way to keep questing fresh and avoid overused MMO tropes. The main questline of the area starts as a dog leads us to his murdered master, and proceeds from there into a lengthy investigation into an assassination plot against the local king.

Combat eschews older MMO conventions



The world of Tamriel is depicted through gorgeous and lush visuals in the new MMO



The Elder Scrolls Online includes a fantastic character customizer, so your character won't look like anyone else

of standing still and shooting off a repeated rotation of skills. Instead, The Elder Scrolls Online focuses on fast action and movement. You swing your weapon with a mouse button press, and many skills focus on changing position for you or your enemy. The newly announced first-person view was not available to play at the show, so it remains to be seen how this combat structure meshes with that traditional Elder Scrolls perspective.

An hour in a new MMO can only scratch the surface of its potential, and many questions about ESO remain unanswered. In particular, we've yet to experience the promised open-world PvP that puts 200-plus players onscreen at a time. Nonetheless, no other MMO at this year's show had as solid a framework in place as The Elder Scrolls Online, and we came away optimistic about where this ambitious undertaking is headed. » **Matt Miller**

Infamous Second Son

Superpowered in Seattle

Infamous Second Son's Delsin Rowe is unrepentant about his newfound powers, even as society fears and vilifies his kind. As we saw at E3, it's easy to understand how a person could grow attached to being superpowered.

In the gameplay video, Rowe infiltrates Seattle's Space Needle to take out surveillance equipment. Protesters have assembled outside of the security perimeter, voicing their displeasure at the heavy-handed reaction to the final events of Infamous 2. In one telling detail, the Department of United Protection has repurposed the Space Needle to act as an antenna. "How long until you're breaking down our doors in the name of safety and security?" one protester shouts at guards as Rowe walks past.

Once he's out of sight, Rowe phases through a chain-link door in a flaming whoosh and overwhelms a DUP officer with a smoking hand over the guard's mouth. The man hits the ground in a fetal position, coughing, as Rowe surges forward toward his next target. This time, he abandons any pretense of stealth, grabbing and throwing the DUP agent to the ground.

Rowe moves ahead, and he's now on the grounds of the Pacific Science Center. It's easy to imagine people stopping in the

courtyard and admiring the towering dinosaur structures, but those days are long gone. A voice on a speaker announces that Rowe is in a restricted area, which isn't much of a surprise. DUP agents attempt to take him out at a distance, but Rowe flings deadly fireballs their way in response. After that wave is taken out (along with an annoying speaker array), he turns his attention on a walkway leading to a guard tower, blasting both down with charged shots.

Rowe shows off another trick as he moves to get a more advantageous vantage point. He rushes toward a ventilation fan on the ground, transforming to his fire-and-smoke form, and then jets out at the roof-mounted fan. He can scale walls and free run through environments, but these ventilation units are definitely faster.

That speed is important, as his antics have attracted more DUP attention. Rowe chips away at cover, dodging fire and tossing it back at his enemies. Once things are at least temporarily calmed, he runs over to an armored van – the focal point of this mission. After blasting out a few side-mounted exhaust ports, a pair of doors swings open at its top. Delsin hops atop the vehicle and slides a glowing generator unit upward. A few powerful palm strikes later, and the machine is disabled.

Rowe kicked the hornet's nest, and swarms

of DUP troops converge on the scene in response. In one final flourish, he rushes headlong into the crowd, charging up a powerful attack. Suddenly, he blasts skyward in a fiery comet. He reforms at the apex, taking a moment to smirk at the camera before diving back to the ground. The resultant shockwave destroys not only the DUP enemies but also a number of environmental elements, including a T-rex sculpture.

It's a fitting end to one of the most over-the-top demos from the show. Sucker Punch is doing some great things with the PS4's hardware – including all that destruction – but I was most impressed by the more subtle effects, like the reflections in puddles and a monorail rumbling by during the middle of a battle. Rowe's powers are also a perfect display of how next-gen hardware can create complex fire and smoke effects. Infamous Second Son is definitely a game to watch, in more ways than one. » Jeff Cork

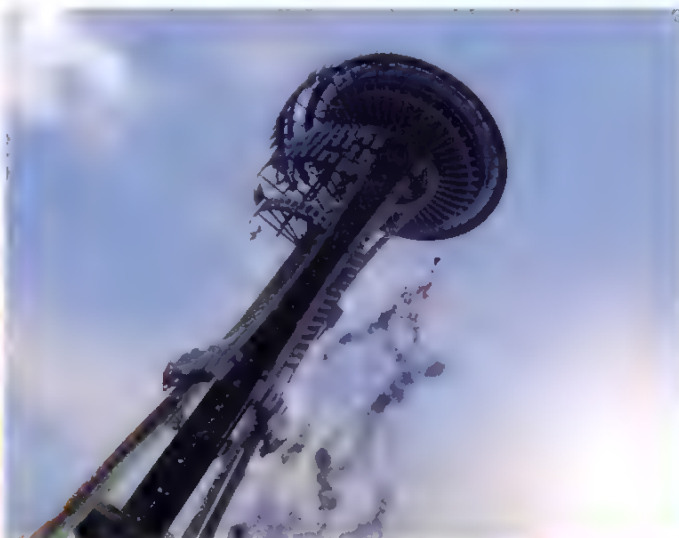
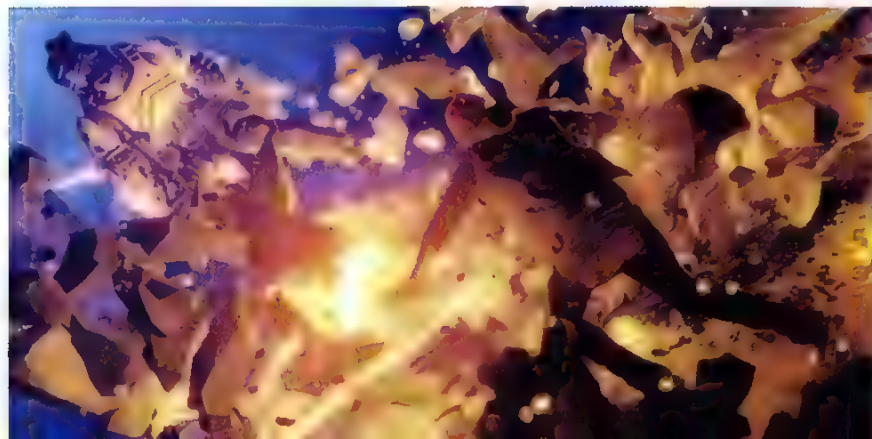
Platform
PlayStation 4

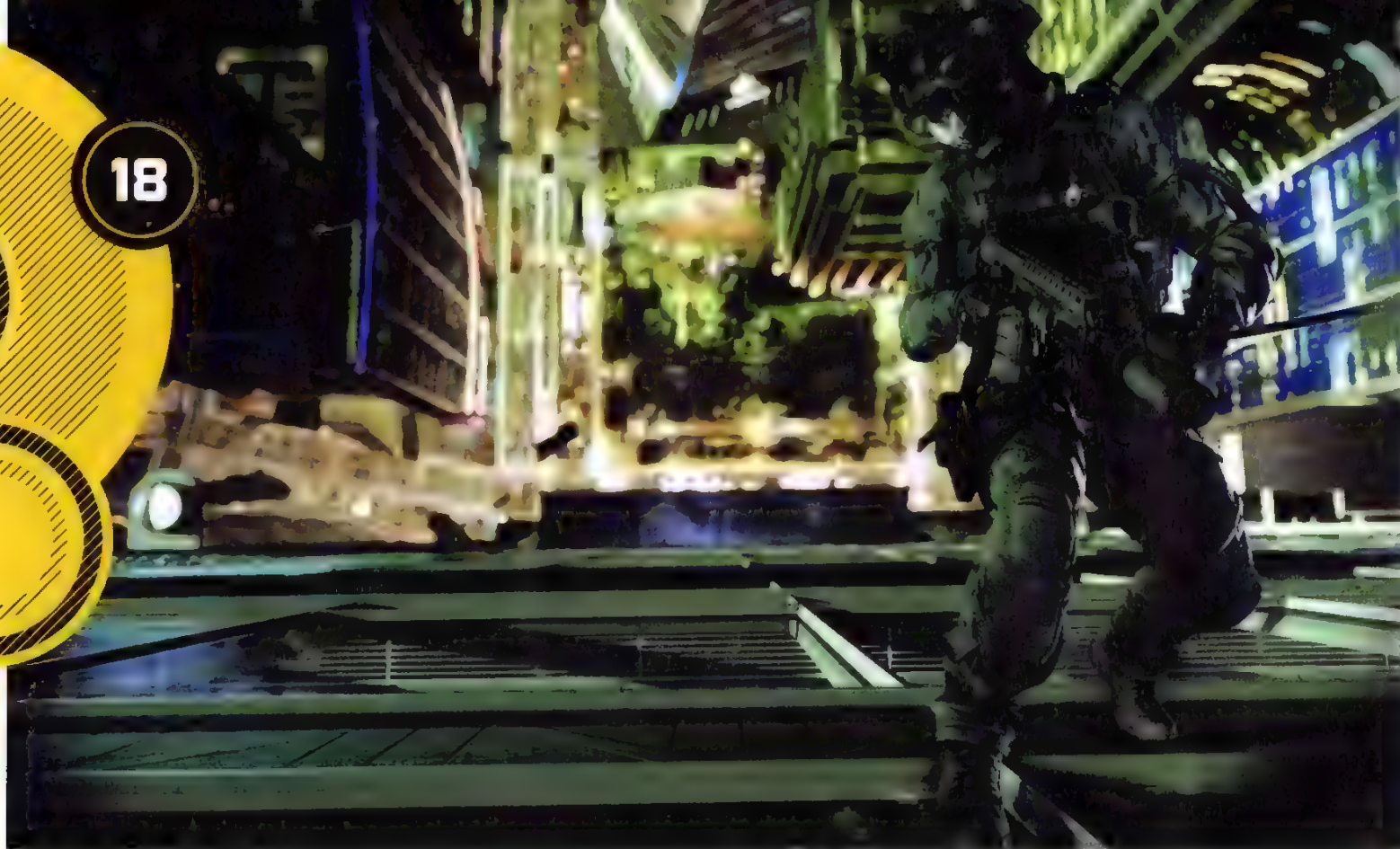
Style
1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBA)

Publisher
Sony Computer
Entertainment

Developer
Sucker Punch

Release
2014





Call of Duty: Ghosts

Infinity Ward's nighttime assault

Platform
PlayStation 4
Xbox One
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Shooter
(Multiplayer TBA)

Publisher
Activision

Developer
Infinity Ward

Release
November 5
(PS3, 360, PC)
TBA
(PS4, Xbox One)

During a behind-closed-doors session at Activision's E3 booth, members of the press witnessed an explosive new Call of Duty: Ghosts mission.

Federation Day tasks players with infiltrating an enemy-filled skyscraper in Venezuela, and it's packed with the series' trademark set-piece moments.

At the outset of the demo, fireworks pepper the sky as the city celebrates a festival dozens of stories below. Along with a few other members of the elite Ghosts team, the player has to set up zip-line launchers on a rooftop at night. Once these launchers fire their lines to a massive skyscraper across the street, the Ghosts begin their assault.

Detaching their zip lines prior to reaching the adjacent rooftop, the team swings down and lands in a rappelling position on the side of the building. As the Infinity Ward developer at the controls sneaks his character down the side of the building, an assortment of guards are seen playing poker and hanging out in an otherwise empty room. One leaves to go to the kitchen, giving the Ghosts an opportunity to walk along the outside of the building until they have a good shot. The enemy is riddled with bullets as he reaches for his mug of coffee, and the team moves back to take out his card-playing compatriots.

With the room cleared, the Ghosts cut circles in the windows and enter the building. As the player arms a bomb and places it in what appears to be a server room, one of his teammates protects him by stealthily taking down

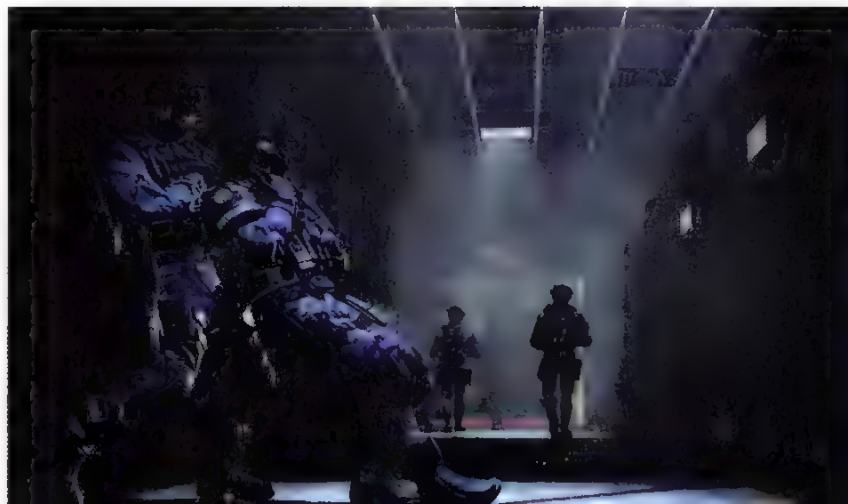
patrolling guards. Once the bomb is armed and the coast is clear, the Ghosts hop back out of the windows and start to sprint down the side of the building.

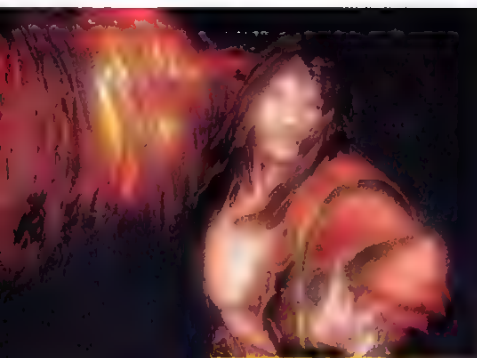
On a balcony below, a blissfully unaware guard stares out at the city. Above him, the player detaches from his rappelling wire and pounces with a knife to the throat. The noise alerts the guard's buddies, who come running onto the balcony to investigate. Slow motion kicks in as the player takes the knife out of the dead guard and throws it into the head of one of the living soldiers. The other baddie is shot, and the demo fades to an "In the interest of time..." text screen.

When the action reappears on the screen,

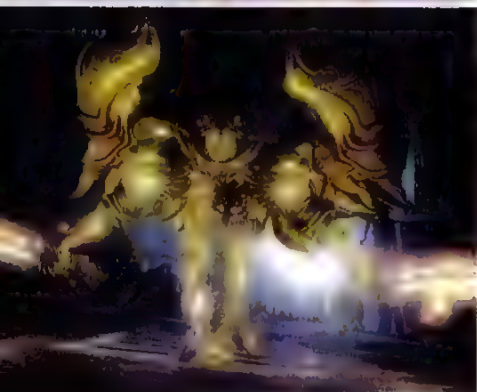
something has apparently gone very wrong. The building is on fire and rumbling as a collapse appears to be imminent. The player slides down a rocky, angled floor as he shoots surviving enemies. Crashing through a window at the end of the sloped floor, it appears that the player is about to plunge to the streets below. On that note, the demo ends.

Call of Duty has always been known for crazy set-piece moments, but Ghosts appears to be going above and beyond the typical assortment. The added power of next-gen hardware adds another layer to the insane sights that Ghosts plans to pump out on a regular basis. » Dan Ryckert





Dracula will have a variety of otherworldly weapons at his disposal



19

Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2

Dracula's story continues in another impressive adventure

In the E3 show floor, eager Castlevania fans had a chance to experience the next chapter of Dracula's tale via an action-packed demo (which was featured in a preview in last month's issue). After playing the demo myself, I got some more details about the game from producer David Cox.

While the first Lords of Shadow was notably lengthy for an action game, Cox says that its sequel will be even longer. "We don't know how to make short games," he says. Hesitant to call the game "open-world," he states that the map gradually opens up and any explored areas can be returned to at any time similar to The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time.

At no point in the game is the action interrupted by a loading screen, so the segmented missions of the first Lords of Shadow are a thing of the past. Dracula can earn new attacks for his Blood Whip, Chaos Claws, and Void Sword, and they can be upgraded by performing the combos rather than purchasing them with an XP or currency system.

My time with the demo left me confident that its ambitious sequel will be a hit amongst action fans. Cox and his team at MercurySteam created the first stellar 3D entry in the Castlevania series, and Lords of Shadow 2 looks ready to top it in every way.

» Dan Ryckert

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Konami

» **Developer**
MercurySteam

» **Release**
Winter



20

Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag

How to be a pirate

Platform

PlayStation 4
Xbox One • Wii U
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style

1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBA)

Publisher

Ubisoft

Developer

Ubisoft Montreal

Release

October 29
(PS3, 360, Wii U),
TBA
(PlayStation 4,
Xbox One, PC)

The latest installment in Ubisoft's annual Assassin's Creed series has many staples fans expect: a struggle between the Templars and Assassins, hidden blades, and an open world to explore. However, the entire experience isn't familiar. Since protagonist Edward Kenway (grandfather of AC III's Connor) is a pirate, the team at Ubisoft is expanding the nautical elements to deliver an experience tailored to life on the high seas.

The first step to becoming a pirate is getting a ship. Edward has that covered thanks to the Jackdaw, the versatile and upgradeable vessel he commands. The Jackdaw is one of the major ways players see their progression and mounting power; as you earn (or plunder) resources, you can afford more improvements for the ship like increasing the number of broadside cannons. The crew levels up as they sail and complete tasks, and the Jackdaw is a key part of exploring and conquering the open water. The ship is a constant and valuable asset, and the team hopes players come to view it as another primary character.

One vessel is great, but any decent pirate has a whole armada. After emerging victorious in ship-to-ship combat, you can add an enemy ship to your fleet – assuming your encounter

didn't destroy it. Naval battles have a similar look and feel to Assassin's Creed III. If you want to take the ship (or salvage its resources), you need to pull back once your opponent sustains enough damage to allow boarding. After you kill the enemy leader, one of your existing crew members can don the captain's hat aboard your new acquisition.

Though you can promote them, a ship's crew is no replacement for an Assassin brotherhood. While the sailors are loyal to Edward, they won't join him in combat or perform long-range assassinations. In essence, the brotherhood mechanics are gone in Assassin's Creed IV. As cool as these features were in previous titles, Ubisoft believes they allowed players to bypass tense and challenging scenarios too easily.

Edward is still an assassin at heart, undertaking missions for the brotherhood to neutralize important targets. Even better, Black Flag doesn't put up a wall between the ship- and land-based gameplay. You may approach a target on the docks, but if you're spotted, the quarry can flee to a nearby ship and attempt to sail away. In those cases, Edward can pursue in the Jackdaw, turning a seemingly routine assassination into a battle that spans both land and sea.

The demo at E3 showcased all these activities, plus more pirate-themed fun like finding buried treasure and singing sea shanties.

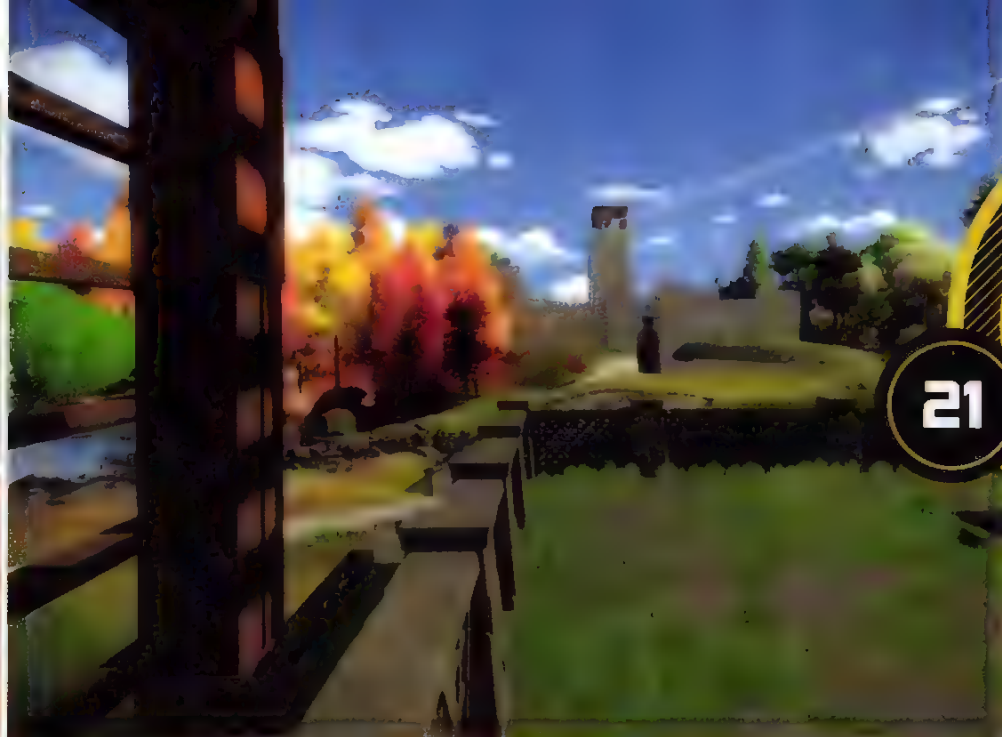
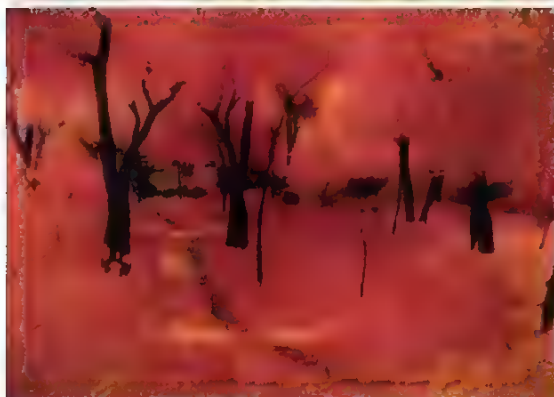
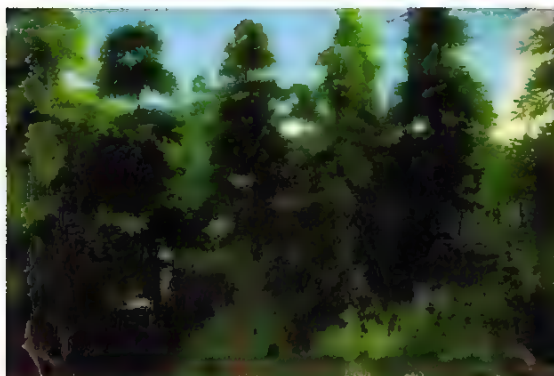
Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag is more than just Assassin's Creed III with more sailing; the old and new mechanics seem to blend well with the pirate theme. What I saw of the game in action left me excited, and as a fan of the series, I'm looking forward to seeing more.

» Joe Juba



Despite the high-seas flavor, you spend plenty of time on land exploring cities, ruins, and hunting for treasure





21

To reach the endgame, players must complete seven of the ten puzzle areas scattered across the island



The Witness

One puzzle, dizzying variations

Fans of Jonathan Blow's work on *Braid* have waited long to see what the creative independent developer would release next. We're inching closer to that day, and the announcement that *The Witness* is on the way to PlayStation 4 should help assure that console gamers don't get left in the lurch.

Set on a mysterious island, the player navigates an open world of trees, gardens, and buildings populated with mazelike puzzles. Each of these puzzles follows the simplest of structures – guide a line from a starting point to the end point of a labyrinth. Working within these constraints, the developer has built an ingenious variation of challenges that build off one another and take the seemingly simplistic puzzle concept in intriguing directions.

One set of puzzles demands that the player look to nearby trees and their twisting branches to find a path to completion on a nearby maze

tile. Another challenges players to think about two lines at once; by drawing one line starting at one of the maze, a second symmetrical line starts on the other side. Complexity is introduced because the barriers of the maze on each side aren't symmetrical.

Puzzles built around a single theme tend to be gathered together in discrete areas of the island, and each set has a set end point. Complete the final puzzle in one location, and a beam of light shoots out from your location to a mountain at the far side of the island. Once seven of ten puzzle areas have been completed, the light beams open up a path to the endgame, though Blow promises that players who complete all ten areas will receive a special surprise.

As you explore, optional audio logs offer narrative context, building out the story of the island, its many puzzles, and your place within the world. In addition to non-linear storytelling,

one of the great joys of the game is its vibrant visuals. The art walks a fine line between hyper-colorful realism and a watercolor aesthetic. The latter becomes more prominent the more distant you are from an object, lending the view a dreamy, cloudlike quality. The bright greens of the trees and deep blue of the sky makes for a breathtaking combination, and the many nooks and crannies of the island assure that *The Witness* should be a fascinating and attractive open world to explore.

The Witness' contemplative puzzles and warm colors were a potent counterpoint to the many loud and destructive PlayStation 4 games Sony showed off at its E3 booth. We're heartened to see independent developers being offered opportunities to share their projects alongside more established publishing partners – a trend we'd love to see continue in future E3 conventions.

» Matt Miller

Platform
PlayStation 4
PC • iOS

Style
1-Player Puzzle

Publisher
Thekla

Developer
Thekla

Release
2013



The Division

Tom Clancy heads in a frightening new direction

Platform
PlayStation 4
Xbox One

Style
1-Player Shooter
(Online TBA)

Publisher
Ubisoft

Developer
Massive
Entertainment

Release
2014

With Rainbow Six missing in action and Ghost Recon in a slump, Sam Fisher has carried the Tom Clancy torch for Ubisoft in recent years.

The brand once known for world-hopping clandestine operatives who prevent world disasters is exploring a frightening new direction in *The Division*: What happens when all those highly trained agencies fail to prevent a terrorist attack?

In *The Division*, society begins unraveling on Black Friday. After a terrorist organization unleashes a deadly virus via currency on the biggest shopping day of the year, the disease spreads quickly. Within months, once-vibrant centers of industry like New York City are carved up into heavily guarded quarantine zones housing the surviving citizens and ungoverned regions where everything is in a state of decay.

The Division places players in the middle of this crisis, as an operative of a secret government directive created to keep the fabric of society from unraveling altogether during doomsday scenarios. In practice, the game operates like an open-world online cooperative role-playing shooter. Armed with upgradable

weaponry and gadgets, players take on missions to help rebuild the city's infrastructure.

During the E3 demo, a team of operatives responds to a distress beacon emanating from a nearby police station. Upon reaching the building, a firefight opens up with an unknown NPC faction. The player perspective is reminiscent of third-person shooters like *Max Payne 3*, but in these shootouts you must stick to cover to survive. Massive's proprietary Snow Drop engine is on full display during this shootout, with bullets ripping through car windows and tearing apart cover. During the fight, one of the players deploys a spherical heat-seeking grenade that rolls along the ground to take out its target, the kind of cool near-future gadget we've come to expect from Clancy games. Once the group clears the police station, they release the officers from custody and are rewarded with directions to the loot-laden police armory.

The Division eschews player classes in favor of letting each user dictate his or her own play style. As you gain XP, you can unlock new skills that augment your strengths or shore up your weaknesses. Rather than being locked into a progression trajectory, you can respect on the fly.

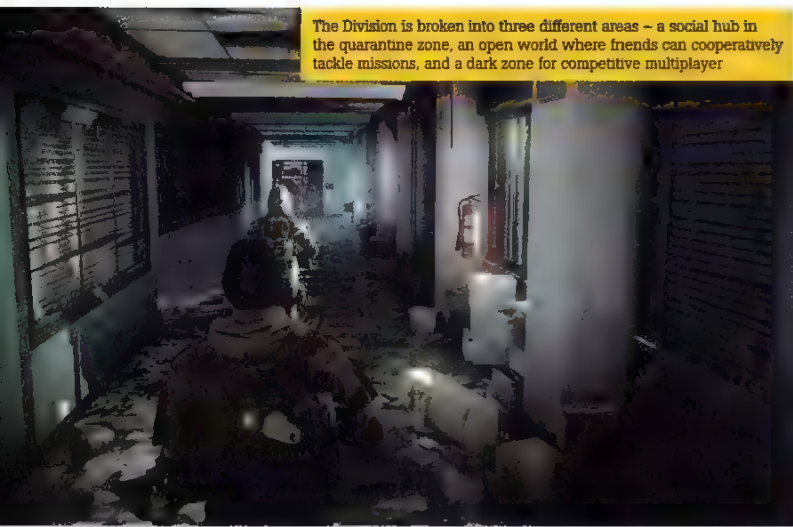
Much like Bungie's ambitious *Destiny*, *The Division* hopes to blur the line between cooperative campaign missions like these and competitive multiplayer. Upon clearing out the armory and picking up a new assault rifle, the team deploys a flare to start mission extraction. Upon doing so, another group of players moves in on their position for a player vs. player skirmish. In addition, the quarantine zones act as social hubs, where players can meet to form up parties and presumably trade goods or buy new gear.

Even when you're away from your console, you can participate in the persistent world via a tablet app. Via an overhead view, a tablet player can heal teammates, apply armor debuffs to enemies, and even call in missile strikes. The action is fully synced with the consoles, so there is no delay from what you're seeing on the tablet and what's happening with your friends on the ground.

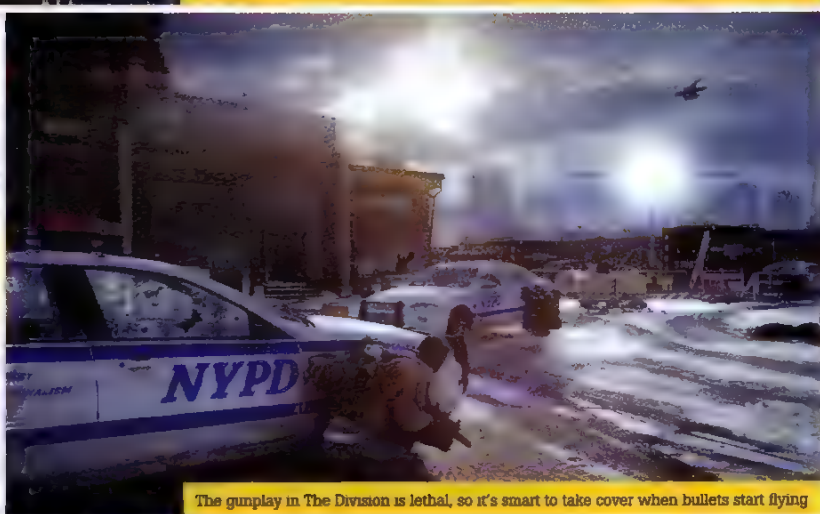
The Division certainly has next-generation ambitions, and we're curious to learn more about how it blends the line between the various genres it employs in the near future.

» Matt Bertz

The Division is broken into three different areas - a social hub in the quarantine zone, an open world where friends can cooperatively tackle missions, and a dark zone for competitive multiplayer



The interactive map is great for orienting your player and highlighting available missions



The gunplay in The Division is lethal, so it's smart to take cover when bullets start flying

Dead Rising 3

The zombie apocalypse goes next-gen

Platform
Xbox One

Style
1-Player
Action

Publisher
Microsoft
Studios

Developer
Capcom
Vancouver

Release
November

23

A Smart Use for SmartGlass

In one of the most impressive implementations of SmartGlass we've seen so far, Dead Rising 3 uses your smartphone to break the fourth wall. The UI for the companion app mimics that of an in-game PDA, allowing you to install different apps and change your ringtone as though it were a regular phone. Players can use the faux apps to call in air strikes and drone attacks, while incoming calls and texts provide the player with exclusive missions. Players can also use SmartGlass to locate hidden items in the world, and receive real-time updates on what's happening in the city.

Itanfall may have gained Microsoft the most attention during this year's E3, but it wasn't the only ambitious console exclusive the company showed off. Capcom Vancouver's grittier take on the Dead Rising series features enough improvements and next-gen features to once again get us excited for the zombie apocalypse.

Dead Rising 3 takes place 10 years after its predecessor, on the third day of a new outbreak in Los Perdidos, California. The game stars new protagonist Nick Ramos, a mechanic trying to escape the city before it's leveled by an impending military airstrike.

Capcom Vancouver is creating a larger and more open world for Dead Rising 3, that it says is bigger than the playable areas of Dead Rising 1 and 2 combined. Los Perdidos is split into four distinct districts, which includes a suburban area—a departure from the business-focused locations of previous games.

Due to the size of Los Perdidos, driving plays a more important role in Dead Rising 3 than in past installments. Capcom Vancouver is including more vehicles and improving the way zombies interact with cars. The undead can now hang onto cars and attempt to pull you out of windows, and more realistic physics means that a dense crowd of zombies can bring your car to a halt if you don't have enough initial speed when plowing into them. Given the importance the protagonist's vocation has always played in the series, we wouldn't be surprised if Ramos can use his mechanic skills to customize or upgrade cars, though Capcom Vancouver wouldn't comment on the possibility. What we do know is that Ramos is capable of crafting weapons on the fly—players no longer have to track down a workbench to create new tools of destruction.

Capcom Vancouver's hands-off demo made it immediately clear the developer is putting the power of Microsoft's next-gen console to good use. Environments and characters now exhibit much greater detail; glass shatters realistically, zombies are more varied, and you can see the texture differences of your character's clothing depending on what type of fabric they're made of. Despite the increased level of detail,

Dead Rising 3 features hundreds of onscreen zombies at a given time and greater draw distances. During the demo, the developer cut a wide swath of destruction through one of the city's districts, running through crowded streets, driving cars, and entering and exiting buildings all without a single loading screen.

Fans of the series may be wary of Dead Rising 3's darker tone, but Capcom Vancouver says the shift was necessary to make the zombies seem scarier and more formidable. The developer also wants to add more horror elements, but that doesn't mean there will be a lack of craziness. In addition to a new arsenal of ridiculous weapon combos (including the zombie-dismembering sledge saw), Ramos can also don a wide variety of humorous costumes, which carry over into cutscenes. Capcom Vancouver says this allows players to photobomb the more-serious main story,

providing plenty of improvised laughs for those enjoy the past wackiness of the series. Disgusting new finishing moves also ratchet up the chaos to new heights.

Capcom Vancouver is crafting one of the most impressive post-apocalyptic sandboxes we've seen yet, and as such doesn't want to limit your playtime in the world. Dead Rising 3 features two play modes. Normal mode allows players to explore Los Perdidos at their leisure without timed missions, while the game auto-saves their progress. Nightmare mode delivers the classic Dead Rising experience, with a constant time threat driving the action forward and a single save file that's only accessible through bathrooms.

However you decide to play it, by making the jump to new hardware, Capcom Vancouver is making an open-world action game worthy of the next-gen moniker. » Jeff Marchiafava



The open world of Los Perdidos is bigger than Dead Rising 1 and 2 combined, and contains four distinct districts





New protagonist Nick Ramos – seen here brandishing a sledge saw – can craft combo weapons on the fly, without the need to visit workbenches



Not So Brain Dead

Zombies aren't exactly known for their intellect, but Capcom Vancouver is working hard to ensure Dead Rising 3's undead are more than just mindless cannon fodder. New horde AI allows zombies to travel in packs and exhibit a shared awareness of their surroundings. Screaming zombies alert their undead brethren to your presence, and new vocation-based zombies pose a significantly greater threat. For example, firemen zombies wield the axes of their former profession, while football zombies wear brain-protecting helmets and can tackle Ramos to the ground.



Vehicles play a more important role in Dead Rising 3 – just make sure a zombie doesn't pull you out of the window

Saints Row IV

New heights of silliness

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBA)

Publisher
Deep Silver

Developer
Volition

Release
August 20

Volition welcomed the current generation of consoles with the original Saints Row, and it's prepared to send it off with what it claims is the series' conclusion. We had a chance to play the insane fourth entry at E3, and it's as loud, ridiculous, violent, and gleefully stupid as expected. It's also a blast to play.

At the beginning of the demo, the player is established as the acting President of the United States. As he strolls through the White House, the president gets briefed on the state of the union, passes cabinet members as they smoke weed, greets strippers who hold trays of booze, chooses between a bill to cure cancer or another to solve world hunger, and punches

a jerk of a congressman in the crotch. After that, things get silly.

An alien invasion descends upon the White House, and its perpetrators start abducting members of your cabinet. Retreating to the Oval Office, the president grabs a gun from the wall and begins blasting his way through the alien-filled hallways. Once a couple dozen extraterrestrials meet their demise, the president hops into a red, white, and blue missile turret and brings down several alien craft. This section of the demo ends with the player being captured by the alien leader.

Next up was an open-world demonstration, giving me the freedom to run around Steelport with a high-level character. Getting to where I'm headed is easy as I sprint at super speed, leap high into the air, and glide through the city. As easy as this makes navigation, it will probably eliminate the need to drive later in the game.

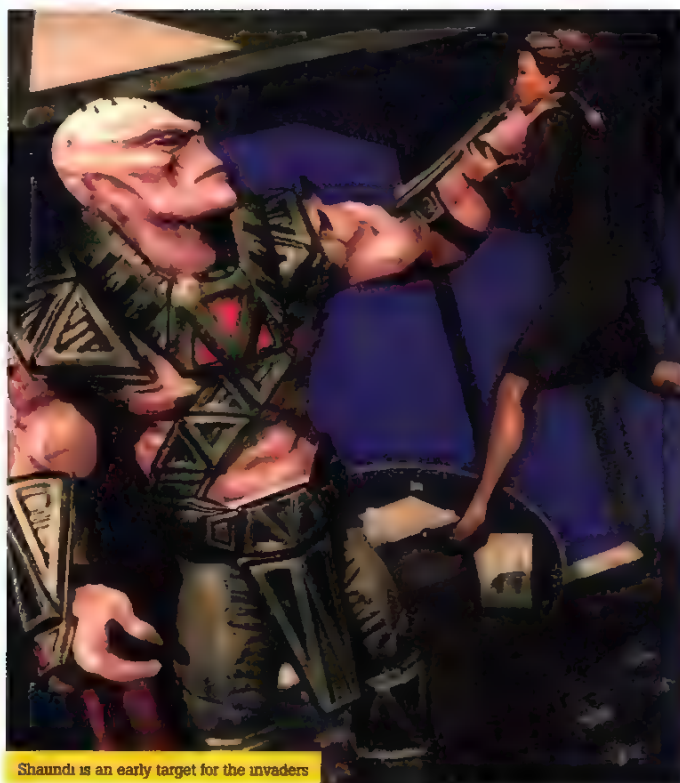
Assigning and using your super powers works great, and they come in handy in

combat. After assigning a power via the weapon selection menu, the RB button allows me to perform telekinesis, create a fire shield around myself, freeze enemies and objects, or stomp the ground to create a shockwave. Telekinesis is my favorite. I get a kick out of grabbing a pedestrian, sprinting to the top of a building, and flinging them far into the horizon.

New weapons are also useful and entertaining, allowing the player to create black holes and kill enemies with dubstep. A high point is creating a black hole in the sky, then tossing pedestrians into oblivion with telekinesis. Being able to fire weapons while using telekinesis is a nice touch, and everything controls well.

In another E3 filled with super-serious assassins and elite military squads, it was encouraging to see Volition continue to embrace silliness with the next Saints Row entry. It's looking like it will push into "adult Looney Tunes" territory even further than previous games in the series, and that can only be a good thing for fans.

» Dan Ryckert



Shaundi is an early target for the invaders



Who needs wheels?

South Park: The Stick of Truth

LARPing and projectile poop in South Park Elementary

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We haven't seen much from South Park: The Stick of Truth since we first revealed the game with THQ and Obsidian in the January 2012 issue of Game Informer. Now the game is being published by Ubisoft, which showcased a portion of the game at its E3 presentation. The player-controlled new kid in town partners with Butters to battle through a LARP-embroidered South Park Elementary.

The Obsidian developer at the controls guides the new kid through the halls of the school, which are crawling with children wearing makeshift armor and carrying swords and hammers. The two-sided conflict is between the elves, led by Stan and Kyle, and the humans, led by Grand Wizard Eric Cartman. Bumping into one of these wandering make-believers is inevitable, and launches players into a separate battle screen.

Combat is similar to your standard turn-based RPG action, but with a South Park

flair. Timed button presses augment standard attacks and initiate dodges, similar to the Paper Mario series. Whacking an enemy with a hammer bloodies them and produces a sickeningly convincing sound. The Stick of Truth adds creativity with its "magic spells," which involve combining household items to deadly results. The new kid casts a fireball with hairspray and a lighter, and electrocutes a hapless child with a bucket of water and a car battery. These special abilities preserve the show's cringe-inducing violence while opening up fantastical battle options.

Creativity helps in combat, but it's also necessary for navigating the school's dangerous hallways. Butters and the new kid encounter an enemy kid standing on a huge garbage blockade. Normally, the new kid could use his powerful fart ability to knock him from the hill, but a strategically placed fan makes this difficult. Players have a few options in this dilemma. They can either trigger a sprinkler

above the fan to short it out, or use an anal probe satellite to teleport into the vents above. Once within, Butters and the new kid harness the power of the Underpants Gnomes to shrink themselves and navigate the narrow ventilation shaft. These multi-path situations look like entertaining breaks from the otherwise straightforward combat.

Later on, Butters and the new kid encounter Stan Marshwalker in a boss battle. His loyal hound, Sparky, joins him. The dog uses his Call of the Wild ability, which consists of barking at the player and peeing on them. The new kid counters with a fart, which gives Stan a "grossed out" status effect, causing him to puke intermittently. The Obsidian developer eventually wins the battle and earns Stan's Blade of the Ranger. Players use a Facebook-like app on an in-game phone to equip weapons, accept quests, and manage party members.

The presentation concludes with a standoff between Kyle and Cartman. The new kid must choose a side, and the dev at the controls picks to fight Cartman. The new kid's opening strike is to throw a piece of poop at Cartman (which was acquired earlier after defecating in a urinal). The fight concludes with a spectacular fart duel between the two, which plays out like two Dragon Ball Z characters blasting each other.

South Park: The Stick of Truth is bound to impress fans. If you saw it on a TV without noticing a controller, it'd be hard to tell it was a game. The gameplay, cutscenes, and voice acting combine to deliver a game that's impeccably similar to its TV counterpart. The loyalty to its source material, solid turn-based combat, and exploration elements should entertain even casual fans of the show. » Tim Turi

Platform
PlayStation 3,
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Role-Playing

Publisher
Ubisoft

Developer
Obsidian Entertainment

Release
Holiday

What's Kenny's situation here?



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Lego Marvel Super Heroes

Lego's mega Marvel team-up

Platform
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • Wii U
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1 or 2-Player
Action/Platform

Publisher
Warner Bros.
Interactive

Developer
TT Games

Release
Fall

Lego Marvel Super Heroes graced the cover of Game Informer just a few months ago, and the game was playable at E3. Thankfully, Warner Bros.' first foray into the Marvel universe appears to offer more of the series' dependable co-op gameplay with over 100 characters.

As the first Lego Marvel game, Marvel Super Heroes has been designed by TT Games to incorporate a wide swath of the universe. The setting draws from all forms of entertainment, be it classic comics, films, or cartoons. Throughout the game's 15 levels (a mix of open-world and more traditional confined levels), you see iconic locations like Grand Central Station and Thor's home world of Asgard. Alternate versions of major characters based on various incarnations from film and comics are also in tow.

The characters have all the unique abilities you'd expect. Captain America can deflect laser blasts with his shield, Iron Man can hover and shoot repulsor bolts, and Spider-Man uses Lego webs to traverse high platforms. The demo we saw teamed Spider-Man, Iron Man, and — memorably — Hulk as they platformed through Grand Central Terminal on their way with a showdown with a huge Sandman made up of swirling Lego blocks (clearly inspired by a sequence in the film *Spider-Man 3*). The Hulk transformation sequence is adorable, as Bruce Banner squats down and flexes his arms in comedic rage before growing to twice his size. Lego likes the in-game Hulk so much that it's going to manufacture a larger-sized Lego Hulk figure (along with a few other larger characters from the game like Abomination).

Switching between Hulk and Bruce Banner plays into the puzzle solving, such as changing back to Banner to platform to a switch and then HULKing out to pull a giant switch. Every character uses their abilities in a similar fashion, whether it's Spider-Man using his webs to pull down a tower, his spider-sense to uncover hidden items, or Thor using his hammer Mjolnir to activate electrical switches.

In keeping in the new series tradition, the game has voiceovers, including a prominent role for sarcastic fan favorite Deadpool.

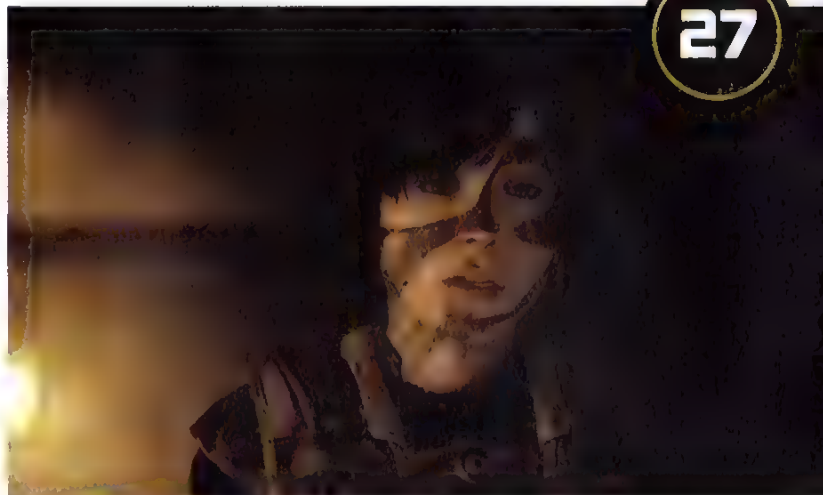
Lego Marvel Super Heroes releases in late 2013 for all next-gen and current-gen systems. Separate handheld games for Vita and 3DS are also in development.

» Matt Helgeson

Beyond: Two Souls

A more intuitive approach

27



Platform
PlayStation 3

Style
1-Player
Action/Adventure

Publisher
Sony Computer
Entertainment

Developer
Quantic Dream

Release
October 8

Quantic Dream built its reputation by creating the compelling, story-driven titles *Heavy Rain* and *Indigo Prophecy*. While the studio's projects explore new narrative frontiers, the gameplay primarily leans on pressing specific buttons when prompted. For *Beyond: Two Souls*, Quantic Dream is pushing that mechanic to the background so players can focus more on the cinematic events and less on waiting for conspicuous button prompts.

After a series of trailers showing off characters and storytelling, *Beyond's* E3 demo highlighted an action-oriented gameplay sequence. Jodie (played by actress Ellen Page) and her supernatural companion Aiden are in Somalia, tasked with assassinating a warlord. They encounter several armed guards along the way, but gunplay isn't the star of the show. Aiden can move undetected through the environment and pass through solid objects, allowing the entity to use its powers on enemies.

Aiden has three primary powers: choke, blast, and possession. They can't be fired off indiscriminately; some enemies have differently colored auras when viewed from Aiden's perspective, and the color determines what power can be used. For instance, an enemy glowing red can be choked, but not possessed. After you've completed the tutorial for these moves, the auras serve as your indication of what actions to perform.

The goal is to provide cues for the player that rely more on observation than obedience. This philosophy also translates to combat while controlling Jodie. When confronted with a soldier swinging a knife at her, players have to read the situation and react accordingly — like tilting the analog stick down to duck, or to the right to follow through with a counter attack motion. This isn't drastically different in practice from the system in *Heavy Rain*, but from my hands-on time, I found watching the characters to be more immersive than responding to commands. » Joe Juba



Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze

Perhaps not the Nintendo franchise you were looking for



Prior to E3, rumors circulated that Retro Studios would be unveiling a new, secret project at the convention. Many online speculated that this would be the long-awaited Retro-developed 3D Metroid game for Wii U. As it turned out, Retro had been cooking up a new title in a storied Nintendo franchise – it just happened to be Donkey Kong Country.

Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze is a 2D platformer that features the same demanding platforming as DKC Returns. However, the move to Wii U has allowed Retro to add a level of visual fidelity and polish that far exceeds what we saw on the Wii. Donkey Kong looks great in HD, with some impressive fur textures. Donkey and his usual partner in mischief Diddy Kong aren't alone; though we didn't see her, Nintendo revealed that Dixie Kong is a playable character in the game as well.

The gameplay is largely similar to Returns and seems to be tailored to use a Wii remote and nunchuck, though Nintendo said that Tropical Freeze can be played with the Wii U GamePad. However, the controls for pounding the ground and a roll attack are still done by shaking the Wii remote and/or nunchuck. Retro is adding a few new gameplay twists to the mix, like the return of swimming to the series and new rings embedded in the ground that DK can pull up to reveal new platforms or other elements in the environment.

A new set of enemies await to try your moves out on. Although the title suggests a frozen treat, it's in fact a reference to the hoard of Vikings and other arctic creatures that are invading Donkey Kong's turf. Walruses, seals, penguins, and more are available for stomping and throwing. Two-player co-op returns, with the second player riding along and assisting as Diddy Kong.

While the game is still very much a 2D platformer, the power of the Wii U allows Retro to use dramatic camera shifts. At one point, DK traverses a series of barrels that curl around a huge tree. The game also adds more detail in the backgrounds of levels; we even witnessed a giant Viking ship explode in our gameplay demo. Character animations are also dramatically enhanced. All of these improvements coupled with gameplay just as tight and responsive as Donkey Country Returns bode well for this sequel. » Matt Helgeson

Platform
Wii U
Style
1 or 2-Player
Action/Platform
Publisher
Nintendo
Developer
Retro Studios
Release
November



Rayman Legends

Making good use of extra time

Playing Rayman Legends with the knowledge that it should have already released is upsetting, but that doesn't make it any less enjoyable. Playing the game without a smile on your face is impossible. Much of the content seen at E3, like levels and bosses, has been added since the announcement of the delay, and it's all great. The team is clearly putting its extra time to good use.

In the 20,000 Lums Under The Sea area, I sneak past lasers and avoid rotating floodlights in my choice of the multiple paths available. This choice extends to the level maps, which hopefully makes the game a little easier as you can choose which levels to pursue.

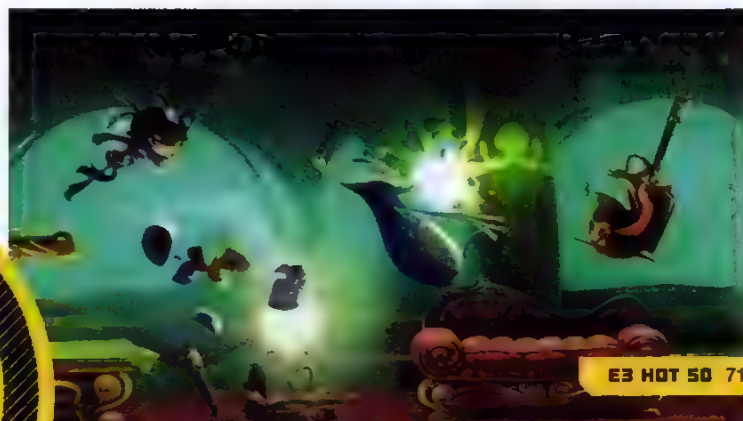
A new boss, a huge robotic dragon that wouldn't have been in the game if it hadn't been delayed, appears. The new engine allows for some 3D modeling, so the robotic dragon moves in and out of the background shooting fireballs and occasionally exposing its weak point – a giant diamond in his mouth.

A particularly difficult stealth-focused section has lasers moving and rotating. The music is reportedly influenced by a laser sneaking scene from the movie *Ocean's Twelve*, and the composer created this fantastic track to only appear in this relatively short section of one level. The score is a big part of the game, and the full development staff entered the studio to help record choruses.

A new mode never before seen had me with one teammate taking on two competitors in a game of two-dimensional soccer. The field takes place on a single screen with a goal positioned on each side. The two teams bounce the ball back and forth for two minutes trying to score in each other's goals. It's simple and exceptionally fun.

The Ubisoft representative said the delay hurt the team for Rayman Legends, but only slightly. Ubisoft had been working on the game, putting in overtime to get it out on time, and the delay meant their work, to a certain degree, went unrewarded. The studio has not squandered the extra time, however, if my time at E3 is indicative of Rayman Legends' quality. » Kyle Hilliard

Platform
Wii U • PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • Vita
Style
1 to 4-Player
Platforming
(PlayStation 3
Xbox 360, Vita)
1 to 8-Player (Wii U)
Publisher
Ubisoft
Developer
Ubisoft Montpellier
Release
September 3



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Payday 2

Having fun with a failed bank heist

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Shooter
(4-Player Online)

Publisher
505 Games

Developer
Overkill Software

Release
August 13

My introduction to Payday 2 plays out like a carefully planned heist from Ocean's *Eleven*. My team's plan is simple: We walk into a small backwater town's bank and keep the security detail busy long enough to drill our way to the cash prize inside the safe. If we play our cards right, we may even get the bank key from the manager. We study blueprints to learn where the manager's office is and the location of the hidden alarm switch. We even figure out where the security team keeps extra ammo, should things go pear-shaped.

After gearing up – I arm myself with a pistol, shotgun, ECM jammer, and a nice two-piece suit – we approach the bank from two vectors. Game Informer editor-in-chief Andy McNamara and I veer off to the bank's right, pausing to sneak a peek into the bank's windows. I make note of a security guard leaning back lazily on

a chair with his feet kicked up on his desk. Our other two crewmates sneak around to the left, eventually reaching the back door.

Our movements are slow and calculated – we don't want to raise any alarms before entering the building. At the most casual pace I can muster, I join my teammates on the backside of the bank. Stashed here is a sack containing the thermal drill. I grab it and move to follow my team into the bank. That was the plan. We were all onboard.

We don't enter, however. Andy is no longer with us. A gunshot rings out, followed by Andy yelling, "Sorry!" He had entered the bank through the front door and stands there unloading rounds into the security guards, who of course return fire. Andy's trigger finger wasn't quick enough; someone has sounded the alarm. A hail of sirens approach from the distance as the bulletproof teller barriers descend.

Despite the unplanned violence, we still have the drill and the four of us are determined to hold our ground to see the job through. I enter the bank through the back door, set up the drill in front of the vault, and activate it – an action that takes some time and requires a button to be held down. After setting up the drill, I secure the hostages with riot cuffs.

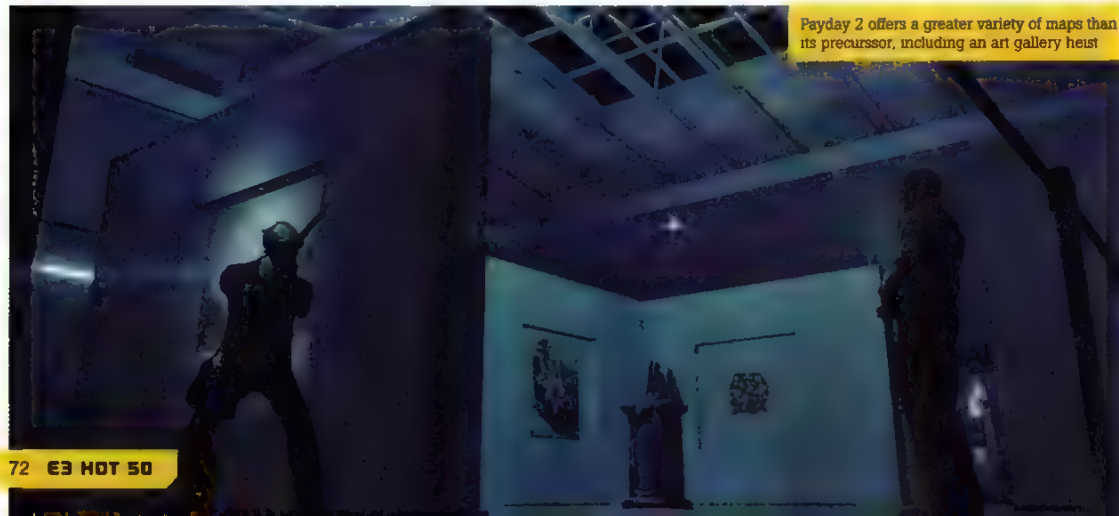
The windows dance with the blue and red hues of police car lights, bullets whizzing into each one. The drill crawls along on its mission, giving us a reading of two minutes until completion. While the stream of police officers seems endless, we hold our own well. That's before the tear-gas canisters arrive, followed by a SWAT team with riot shields and body armor. One by one, we go down. We keep going by reviving each other long enough to get the loot out of the safe, but end up mowed down by hundreds of bullets before we could get it out of the bank.

Even with the Leroy Jenkins of bank robberies holding back our team, we still made a good run at it, and had a blast failing miserably. I left this match wanting to play it again to try different strategies. With the ECM jammer, I could have killed the cameras if I located the key to the security office.

We played the PC version, which delivered smooth controls and beautiful visuals through the entire match. I asked an Overkill spokesperson what would have happened if we walked away with the money, and he said that successful heists are rewarded with new gear, including the chance of rare drops, such as new masks to conceal your identity should you have a person like Andy on your team who shoots first and prefers a bloody approach.

» Andrew Reiner

Payday 2 offers a greater variety of maps than its precursor, including an art gallery heist





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Dark Souls II

Never try to attack a giant turtle from behind

Fans of the Souls series cried foul when the word "accessibility" was used to describe this new entry recently, but Namco Bandai and developer From Software discussed what that meant at E3. Barriers like unnecessary backtracking and complicated stat management are being addressed to make the game less tedious, but the game is still hard as nails.

The engine for Dark Souls has received a hefty upgrade since the previous game, and Dark Souls II shows it. Light and shadowing are improved, and the blackness when there is no source of light is impressive. The most noticeable new element, however, is the animation.

The developer motion-captured performers this time around and everything looks more natural and fluid, but without sacrificing the perceived heft of swinging a sword.

Some new gameplay tweaks were demonstrated at E3, like the use of multiple stances that affect how you use your assorted blades. The dodge roll now takes you further than before, but the window of invulnerability is smaller. Heavy attacks properly used in the middle of a combo use less stamina, effectively rewarding players who master the art of swordplay. New health items called Life Gems were also shown, which are more abundant than health potions but restore less health and

work slowly.

We saw a few skirmishes with weaker enemies, followed by what the team has nicknamed Turtleneck: a giant bipedal, armored mutant turtle. The Namco Bandai representative at the controls doesn't have much luck attacking him head-on, so he tries to rotate behind to stab him in the back. His plan fails spectacularly when Turtleneck, sensing an enemy behind him, jumps backwards. This drops the full brunt of his turtle shell on top of the hero, killing him instantly.

In the Namco Bandai E3 booth, a T-shirt was being offered to anyone who could beat the playable demo's boss. During my time in the booth, no prizes were claimed. — Kyle Hilliard

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player
Action/Role-Playing

Publisher
Namco Bandai

Developer
From Software

Release
March

Dying Light

Running through the apocalypse

In a day and age when video game characters are combining chainsaws with canoe paddles to forge the ultimate zombie killing device, a game that pushes players to sprint away from undead hordes may not sound that exciting. Techland's Dying Light makes a case that the act of avoidance may be just as rewarding as wielding a military's worth of artillery.

Dying Light's make-or-break feature is a parkour-esque traversal system that allows players to quickly ascend buildings and structures in a vast open world. This isn't like Mirror's Edge, where the player is pushed in one direction. The entire city can be scaled, revealing

weapon crates, citizens in need, and paths to secret content.

In my hands-on time with the Xbox One version, I scurried up telephone poles, ascended walls, used train-car roofs to stealthily trek over a sea of undead, and sprinted along a metal girder to reach the momentum needed to leap to a dangling overpass sign. The world's rules of what can be climbed or interacted with are clear as day, and the controls — while a little loose for my liking — worked well, even in high stress situations where I had to distance myself from a dozen-plus sprinting zombies.

Running away may be your greatest weapon in surviving this apocalypse, but it isn't the

only means available. Dying Light provides a robust combat system that offers firearms, but favors blunt and bruising attacks. I made quick work of a zombie herd using a swift kick to knock the lead zombie back into his brethren, followed by a charged-up hammer swing to assault the crowd. Carefully placed pistol shots finished the job. While offering great strategic options, the combat functionality didn't fare as well as the traversal system. I didn't like the feel of the pistol, and I had a few problems determining the range of my melee strikes.

When asked if combat was designed to be less reliable than running, a Techland employee told me that the team's hope is to have the same level of polish across all of the gameplay when the game ships in 2014. Techland's other zombie franchise, Dead Island, has never been known for its polish. Time will tell with Dying Light. — Andrew Reiner

Platform
PlayStation 4
Xbox One
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Action
(4-Player Online)

Publisher
Warner Bros.
Interactive

Developer
Techland

Release
2014



Combat includes light and hard attacks
Hard attacks take more time to charge up



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Super Smash Bros.

A dual smash heads toward Nintendo consoles

Platform
Wii U • 3DS

Style
1-4 Player Fighting
(Online TBA)

Publisher
Nintendo

Developer
Sora Ltd., Namco
Bandai Games

Release
2014

Nintendo has always been fond of revisiting classic franchises on each new console, but they've never taken the Activision route of yearly installments. Because of this, the Smash Bros. series has only seen three installments in fourteen years. Half a decade since the previous entry in the franchise, Super Smash Bros. is making its return on two consoles simultaneously.

Currently going by the simple title of Super Smash Bros., the 2014 release finds its home on the Wii U and 3DS. As has been the case with previous announcements in the series, much of the excitement revolves around which classic gaming characters are added to the roster. The first reveal of E3 was the villager from Animal Crossing. He can take down enemies with his bug-catching net, shovel, and by causing trees to collapse.

During a Wii U software showcase near the beginning of E3, Nintendo showed off a live gameplay demonstration of Mario facing off against another newly revealed fighter: Mega Man. The series newcomer uses his standard Mega Buster moves, as well as special attacks borrowed from Metal Man, Wood Man, Air Man, and Crash Man. When he died, the Blue Bomber burst into circles with his trademark explosion animation.

At the end of the same software showcase, director Masahiro Sakurai revealed one more combatant. The female trainer from Wii Fit is playable in Super Smash Bros., and we saw her fitness-based attacks in action in a reveal trailer. In the brief video, we saw the trainer perform yoga poses, launch soccer balls, summon hula hoops, and launch an army of

silhouettes at her opponents.

Few details have been revealed about specific gameplay mechanics or how exactly the two versions interact with each other, though Sakurai ruled out the possibility of cross-platform multiplayer. The 3DS version features a much lower-resolution, cel-shaded art style than the more powerful Wii U version. One thing that Sakurai has made clear in interviews is that the tripping mechanic that many fans

disliked in Brawl is no longer included.

Along with Zelda, Mario's core platforming titles, and Mario Kart, Super Smash Bros. has been consistent in terms of both quality and commercial success. Nintendo takes its sweet time with putting these games out, and it shows. From the glimpses we've seen of its next incarnation, fans should look forward to punching each other into oblivion late into the night once again. » Dan Ryckert



Senes veterans Mano and Kirby make their return



The three newcomers set their sights on Nintendo's top dog



Star Fox nimbly avoids a swipe from Link



Most of the Wii Fit Trainer's moves are based on workout routines and yoga poses

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IT'S ON DA FRITZ!



Mario & Luigi: Dream Team

Luigi steps outside of Mario's shadow and into a dream

Platform
3DS

Style
1-Player Role-Playing

Publisher
Nintendo

Developer
AlphaDream

Release
August 11

The eponymous plumber siblings dive into Luigi's dreams to save a freshly kidnapped Princess Peach in this latest entry in the Mario & Luigi RPG series. With a large portion of the game existing in a dream world, plenty of opportunities to showcase the series' signature brand of bizarre humor and strange antics abound.

Luigi can do some of the heavy lifting in the dream world. The green brother can break himself into hundreds of small Luigis that can stand on each other's shoulders to form a tower, or form into a ball and roll around causing all kinds of destruction.

While Luigi is sleeping, you can poke him in the face or tug on his moustache on the lower screen to make things happen in the dream world. In one instance, Luigi's face and moustache appear in the background of a level. Mario grabs the background moustache, and the player tugs on Luigi's moustache on the lower screen to slingshot Mario to the top of the stage.

Along with turning into tiny versions of himself, Luigi can also turn into a gigantic form when the 3DS system is turned sideways. Players control the giant Luigi on one screen, while an enormous enemy takes up the entirety of the second screen.

The year of Luigi is in full swing with Dream Team. He's still not the main star of the game, but he is a co-star – which is better than playing a supporting role any day. » Kyle Hilliard

Hometown Story

Making the people around you matter



Platform
3DS

Style
1-Player Simulation

Publisher
Natsume

Developer
Toybox Games

Release
Fall

Natsume has been synonymous with Harvest Moon for the past 16 years. The company still has plans for its flagship series, but it's ready to also be defined by a new game. And what better person to make it than Harvest Moon creator Yasuhiro Wada?

Similar to his other title, Wada's new game Hometown Story is based on his own life and hometown. He found success in Tokyo, but later returned home and was mesmerized by the changes. Wada became motivated to make a game about time's impact.

In Hometown Story, you choose a female or male avatar who inherits a shop from grandma. Managing a store is no easy task, as you need to stock the right items and provide variety. A villager might request a specific product, and you must decide if it's worth the effort to get it done. Sometimes you need to seek out a particular vendor, other times it must be located in the vast mountains.

Villagers are savvy and know when they're being ripped off, so setting reasonable prices is key. It also means not pricing so low as to be unprofitable. A smart business sense gets you far. The emphasis isn't so much on finding the best quality of items, but instead on fulfilling the villagers' needs. If you need help, a sidekick named Pochica – a genderless flying white rodent with pink hair – can give you hints and has its own story to uncover.

Most impressive is Wada's determination to make interactions and friendships with villagers genuine. Just like real life, we all need a helping hand to get by, and some of the villagers have moving stories of their own. But you can't fix everyone's problems; you're only one person. With 30 unique villager stories, you have to choose who's worth it. The decision won't be easy, which is the way Wada wanted it. That's why you can only grant the wish of one villager in a playthrough, so choose wisely.

How fitting is it that transformation is a theme of Hometown Story? Progression and change are an undeniable part of life, and it's refreshing to see Wada try something new. » Kimberley Wallace





Tearaway

Media Molecule's paper wonderland

Platform Vita **Style** 1-Player Action/Platform

Publisher Sony Computer Entertainment **Developer** Media Molecule **Release** Fall

Media Molecule is known for bringing a creative flair to the action/platform genre, and its new Vita title *Tearaway* looks to follow in the charming footsteps of the *LittleBigPlanet* series. *Tearaway* transports players into a world made entirely of paper, with storybook levels that fold and unfold to reveal hidden areas and secrets. The game also breaks the fourth wall by allowing the player to

manipulate the world with the Vita's back touchpad and touchscreen controls. You can rip through the game world with your finger on the back pad, sending enemies flying, or use it to bounce drums that help protagonist Iota reach higher platforms. You can also unroll bridges or peel away barriers with the front touchscreen. All in all, it's another inventive and infectious title from Media Molecule. » Matt Helgeson



Mercenary Kings

Run-and-gun meets RPG

Platform PlayStation 4 • PC **Style** 1 to 4-Player Action (4-Player Online)

Publisher Tribute Games **Developer** Tribute Games **Release** Fall

Some of the best moments in any E3 are the surprises that come out of left field. *Mercenary Kings* caught a lot of eyes due to the game's similarity to the bodacious art style seen in *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*; several of the developers of that game make up Tribute Games. The similarities end there, as *Mercenary Kings* looks to games like *Contra*, *Dark Souls*, and *Borderlands* for much of its gameplay inspiration.

Up to four players (split-screen or online) can hop in to the roles of

mercenaries sent into a dangerous jungle island to stop the insidious Claw Corporation. Thirty levels of platforming and shooting are available, but you'll return to each multiple times over the course of the game's 100 missions. In addition to classic run-and-gun action, an extensive weapon customization feature lets players use 300 distinct gun parts to craft their own tools of destruction, on top of 100 different combat knives you can pick up. Just a few minutes playing with the new PlayStation 4 controller had us hooked. » Matt Miller

Pikmin 3

Nintendo's little soldiers return



The legendary Shigeru Miyamoto helps oversee all of the Nintendo's game development, but *Pikmin 3* is the project he's been most involved in lately. For Miyamoto, the increased power of the Wii U offers the chance to create a game that he'd always envisioned. "We wanted to design it in a way that by playing it longer and longer, you get to understand the depth of the game," Miyamoto says.

Though the game is releasing on Wii U, it's actually designed to be used with the Wii remote and nunchuk. This adds a lot of depth of strategy and fine control to the gameplay. Miyamoto says, "The fact that, because you're using the pointer to aim gives you the ability to be more precise and aim at specific parts of the enemies' bodies. For example, if you throw Pikmin directly at the [enemy's] eyes, and they are attacking his eyes; what will happen is it will close its eyes and stop moving for a moment, giving you an advantage. In other enemies, it might be advantageous to attack the softer parts of its body or the rear portion."

Additional strategy comes into play with the new Pikmin types — rock and flying Pikmin. Flying Pikmin probably affect your strategy the most as they can fly over and transport items over water. You can also juggle control between three separate commanders, which allows you to conduct Pikmin offensives on more parts of the map at once.

The game features cooperative and online multiplayer modes, though Miyamoto confirmed that there is no online play due to technical restrictions. Competitive multiplayer is featured in a new Bingo mode which was shown at E3, pitting you against a friend in a race to collect certain items in the environment and mark them off your bingo card. There have also been some concessions towards ease of use made in the main campaign, allowing you to more easily save progress and replay days.

Essentially, it's exactly what Nintendo excels at: taking a proven formula and making it bigger and better. We expect *Pikmin* fans to be pleased. » Matt Helgeson



Platform
Wii U

Style
1 or 2-Player
Strategy

Publisher
Nintendo

Developer
Nintendo

Release
August 4

Mario Kart 8

The series is more magnetic than ever

Platform
Wii U

Style
1 to 4-Player Racing
(12-Player Online)

Publisher
Nintendo

Developer
Nintendo

Release
Spring

Look closely at the "8" in Mario Kart 8's logo, and you'll notice that the numeral also doubles as a Möbius strip, a topographical curiosity that challenges conventional thoughts about top and bottom. It's no coincidence, as I learned after taking Wario out on the track for a few mind-bending races.

In Mario Kart 8, the karts add yet another gimmick to their already impressive repertoires. I saw it in action during what started out as a traditional-looking toadstool-circuit style race. Hairpin turns turn extreme as the track's surface twists and spirals. Fortunately, Wario's ride is equipped to handle it. His wheels rotate sideways and magnetize, keeping him firmly stuck to an impossibly precarious surface.

The next level is a seaside resort, complete with a Statue of Liberty-style monument off the shore, with Peach in the position of honor. Drivers who stick to the main path won't see much of the new magnetic mechanic on this course; it is only available as an optional wall-riding detour. The third and final track is Ghost House-themed, and it turns out to be my favorite. The drivers race through corridors, sticking to walls and diving underwater. The twisting passages could have been designed by M.C. Escher.

The racing is solid, and the GamePad

provides the flexibility to try a few different configurations. I gave the gyroscopic controls a shot, but I quickly swapped them for the traditional analog-stick setup. Some people might prefer motion controls; I don't count myself among them. The controller's screen can function as a minimap, but I got more use out of having it act as my horn; pressing the button elicits an appropriately rude blast from Wario, perfect for gloating each time a rival spins out on a banana peel or gets knocked aside by one of his shells. No new weapons make an appearance during my time, but if

past games have shown anything it's that the arsenal will likely expand by at least a couple of new additions.

Nintendo isn't saying how many tracks are in the game, but the three that I got to race on were as well-designed as any I've experienced in the series. I'm curious to see how the magnetic elements are used throughout the other level designs. Judging from what I played, they don't need to be overwhelming to make things interesting. One thing is certain: Now that it's on the HD-capable Wii U, Mario Kart finally looks as good as it plays. » Jeff Cork



Killzone: Shadow Fall

Guerrilla's FPS meets an open world

Killzone: Shadow Fall had a fantastic showing at E3, not only erasing some of the doubts I had about the game but inking it onto my PS4 launch-day shopping list. Its first demo at the PlayStation reveal event ticked all the contemporary FPS checkboxes, but it didn't look like the evolutionary leap that I was hoping to see from a next-gen game. That changed at E3. After more than 30 minutes of hands-on time with the game, I'm a convert.

Guerrilla Games is moving away from a linear campaign structure to something with more flexibility. I had several objectives to achieve during my demo, and I could attack them in whatever order I wanted. Each of these sub-missions can potentially affect the others. Some objectives have wide-reaching implications, so it makes sense to think about things before opening fire on the first cluster of soldiers you see. Wipe out enemy communications, for instance, and the Helghast can't call in support. Or meet up with your stranded crew to not only retrieve critical intel, but also gain their support in combat.

My demo started on the wooded side of the security wall that divides Vekta City. The Vektans live in the modern-looking city shown in the game's reveal. My character, Lucas Kellan, is a Shadow Marshal on a covert

mission. Thirty years after Killzone 3, the Helghast are pushing back against the uneasy peace that followed. You're typically alone in your missions, and if you fail, you're also on your own. You aren't completely isolated, however, thanks to a robotic friend called the OWL.

The OWL is a multipurpose attack drone—think Halo's Guilty Spark, only tactically useful and thankfully mute—and it makes Shadow Fall's combat feel as fresh as it is flexible. He can perform one of four actions, which are accessed by quick swipes on the PS4's touchpad. He can fire off ziplines for quick traversal or hack into computers to shut down alarms or complete mission objectives. He can also activate a one-way temporary shield, which blocks enemy fire but allows you to attack through it. Finally, you can send him to specific areas, where he'll attack enemies for you. If the OWL is damaged in combat, he returns to his usual perch on the player's back to repair himself.

Before I took over on the controls, I saw how combat situations could play out. The Guerrilla Games rep played aggressively, using the OWL's shields to provide temporary respite from his relentless push. It was effective, and it was thrilling to watch. I played it far safer, commanding my OWL to advance and attract enemy fire. Helghast are intimidating fighters, but even they can be distracted. While the OWL

kept enemies occupied, I often flanked them or otherwise caught them by surprise. Even though our tactics were different, neither was objectively better.

My methodical approach gave me one advantage, however. I was able to fully absorb the visuals, which are stunning. Killzone hasn't been known for its color palette, but that's changing with Shadow Fall. The forest is lush and vibrant, with rushing streams and towering trees. These segue into massive, detailed interior structures without the slightest sense of the loading tricks that current-gen consoles employ.

Killzone: Shadow Fall is one of Sony's first-party launch games for PlayStation 4, which is due out this holiday season. » Jeff Cork

Platform
PlayStation 4

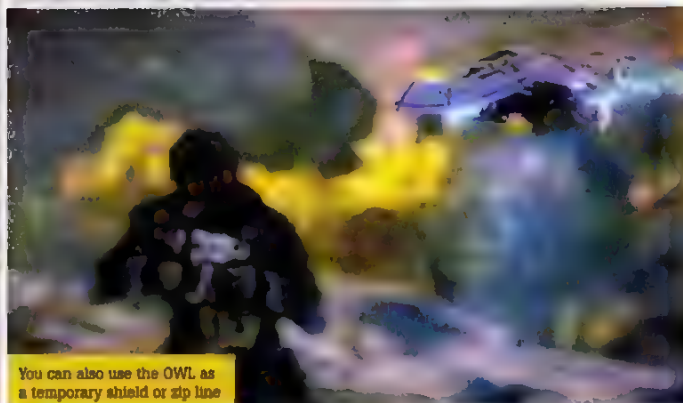
Style
1 Player Shooter
(Multiplayer TBA)

Publisher
Sony Computer
Entertainment

Developer
Guerrilla Games

Release
Holiday

The Helghast are mounting an offensive, and it's up to your Shadow Marshal to stop them



You can also use the OWL as a temporary shield or zip line

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Fantasia: Music Evolved

Harmonix makes the case for next-gen music games

Platform
Xbox One • Xbox 360

Style
1-Player Rhythm/Music

Publisher
Disney Interactive

Developer
Harmonix

Release
2014

The studio known for Dance Central and Rock Band is branching into new territory. Teaming up with Disney, Harmonix is exploring the artistic side of music gaming, and its E3 presentation was one of the most unusual and surprising success stories of the show.

Fantasia draws on two fundamental features of the classic Disney animated film. The first is structural; players explore different worlds one by one, each of which is largely disconnected from the previous one. The underwater shoal and the enchanted newspaper factory are the first two of what will likely be many scenes that players can investigate. The second feature shared with the old film draws

on the most iconic image from the classic: the sorcerer's apprentice, which serves as the central gameplay inspiration. Each player takes on the role of the new sorcerer's apprentice, and the game is controlled (via Kinect) through gestures made to bring music and magic into the world.

In practice, gameplay is split between two distinct styles. Individual scenes offer opportunities for exploration and experimentation, crafting short musical clips from improvised instruments in the world, which in turn bring light, color, and life into the scene. When you've had enough freeform discovery, certain points open up rifts into performance mode where the real meat of gameplay lies. Using

beat-matching hand gestures, song style selectors, and on-the-fly music manipulators, each song can be crafted into a unique creation each time you play.

No one is likely to mistake Fantasia for the complex and intense beat-matching of Rock Band, or the precision-oriented Dance Central. Harmonix is open about the idea that Fantasia is inspired by other experiential games like Flower, in which the game is offering a novel mechanic over complex, structured storytelling. Amid a sea of shooters and action games, Fantasia was a breath of fresh air on the E3 show floor, and an early contender to be the most intriguing use of Kinect for the new Microsoft console. » Matt Miller

The Evil Within

Stealthily avoiding enemies to prevent a bloodbath

Platform
PlayStation 4
Xbox One
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Action

Publisher
Bethesda Softworks

Developer
Tango Gameworks

Release
2014

In a generation in which publishers have largely abandoned triple-A horror games, it's refreshing to see that not everybody has given up on them. Bethesda is teaming up with Resident Evil creator Shinji Mikami's company Tango Gameworks to return to the roots of survival horror. Mikami is also directing and was on-hand at E3 to show off The Evil Within.

The Evil Within opens with the tenseness of the unknown. As detective Sebastian Castellano, you're about to enter a mental hospital that smells of blood and oozes death. Corpses and blood cover the floor; clearly, someone or something has a thirst for flesh, and Castellano isn't about to back away without finding the answer.

The determination is noble, as the journey could cost him his life. It's not long before Castellano has a figure sneak up on him and

he loses consciousness. Soon all you see is a sea of hanging bodies, some with large chunks of flesh missing. You may as well be in a butcher shop, waiting to become someone's next meal. Then you see your butcher: a monstrous, cleaver-wielding figure tearing away the flesh of others, bringing them to his table for further dismembering.

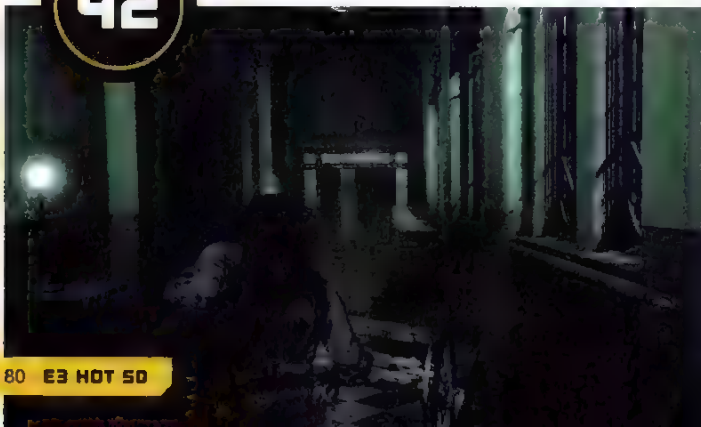
With the brute fixated on his grisly work, now is the time to escape. As Castellano cuts himself down, your intuition is to get to the door, but it's locked and the key hangs near the butcher's table. To avoid battle, you have to watch enemies closely. Castellano waits until the brute walks to a back room and quietly

snatches the key while he is away.

Much like in Clock Tower, hiding places abound. Castellano hides behind curtains, in lockers, and beneath glass windows. Near the demo's end, Castellano throws an object to distract and avoid another monstrous force. Of course, you have a gun for protection, but hiding is a safer alternative that is also easier on your limited resources.

The Evil Within is bringing survival horror back, and so far it looks on the right track with staples of the genre that have often been neglected: hiding, running, and stealth. This isn't just about the guns; it's also about smarts. » Kimberley Wallace

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Contrast

A unique adventure emerges from the shadows

With all of the triple-A action games and next-gen reveals, this year's E3 was a difficult place for smaller titles to get noticed. Residing in the same hall as the monolithic booths of Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo, Focus Home Interactive's modest floor presence didn't get the same number of visitors as its neighbors, but those who stopped by were treated to one of the most intriguing games of the show.

True to its title, *Contrast* features an eclectic mix of elements. The dreamlike world that players explore blends 1920s vaudeville with the film noir of the 1940s. The emphasis on light and shadow extends to the gameplay, which allows players to transition seamlessly between the 3D world and the 2D shadows that fall across the environment's surfaces. The story stars a charming little girl named Didi and her imaginary friend Dawn, but contains some surprisingly adult twists. Such a unique assortment of themes and aesthetics offers plenty of

opportunities for the narrative or gameplay to fall flat, but the segments we played combined them all into a remarkable package.

Compulsion Games studio head Guillaume Provost says each of the game's three acts features new locations, puzzle mechanics, and story twists. The narrative centers on a mystery involving the troubled relationship between Didi's parents. Provost says locations also focus on different styles of gameplay. We got a good sense of Dawn's shadow ability in a platforming-focused area that tasks us with untangling a hot-air balloon that's become stuck on a building overlooking a courtyard. Activating a carousel in the middle of the courtyard casts silhouettes of the horses on the surrounding buildings, providing moving platforms for my shadowy figure to jump across. When we're confronted with an impassable gap, Didi comes to the rescue. She holds up a long stick from below, her shadow providing a temporary bridge to the next ledge.

Another puzzle-oriented area tasks us with illuminating the stage at an abandoned cabaret bar. Shining the lights at the empty stage reveals silhouettes of musicians on the walls. Once all of the characters are in focus, they launch into a full song, which includes a sultry dance number from the band's Jessica Rabbit-esque singer, who is also Didi's mother. The song is performed by jazz singer Laura Ellis; an early trailer for *Contrast* also featured her music, and fan feedback was so positive that Compulsion has composed an all-original soundtrack for the game that features Ellis' exceptional vocals.

Our time with *Contrast* was an excellent reminder of the value smaller teams add to the video game industry. The setting, music, and gameplay all defy mainstream design conventions and provide players with a one-of-a-kind experience. We can't wait to explore more of *Contrast*'s world when it releases later this year.

» Jeff Marchiafava

Platform
PlayStation 4
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Action

Publisher
Focus Home Interactive

Developer
Compulsion Games

Release
2013

Bayonetta 2

Nintendo isn't afraid to keep it crazy

Platform
Wii U

Style
1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBA)

Publisher
Nintendo

Developer
Platinum Games

Release
2014

The announcement of Bayonetta 2 as a Wii U exclusive was a surprise, especially since the first installment was only playable on PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. Even without a history with the series, Nintendo is showing due reverence for Platinum Games' bizarre and outlandish breed of action. The playable demo of Bayonetta 2 on the E3 show floor had everything fans of the original could want – and one thing they definitely don't.

Bayonetta may seem out of place on display alongside characters like Pikmin, Pokémon, and Mario, but Nintendo isn't flinching when it comes to her signature style. Suggestive poses and moans are still a part of her repertoire, but they aren't nearly as important as the wide array of maneuvers that define the combat system.

Standard melee attacks and gunfire are accompanied by stunning visual effects, and things just get more gorgeous as you perform more advanced techniques. Witch time returns, slowing the action around you after a well-timed dodge. Performing hair-based wicked weave attacks remain the goal of basic combos, and summoning gigantic torture devices out of thin air still results in amusing kills. One new mechanic is the Umbran climax, which augments all of Bayonetta's attacks and can only be activated when her magic gauge is full.

All of these moves come together in a sequence of absurd battles that keep the intensity high. Bayonetta encounters angels on a flaming fighter jet in mid-flight, then transitions to a boss fight on a moving train. Jeanne joins her in battle (Rodin is also confirmed as a returning character), and the two witches perform a dual finishing move in which they both punch a hulking angel with enormous hair-hands before Bayonetta summons a demon to complete the job. This demon then breaks free and hurts Jeanne, and Bayonetta takes it down in a King Kong-like encounter as it clings to the top of a skyscraper.

As a big fan of the original, I walked away from my hands-on time with Bayonetta 2 extremely satisfied. The controls feel responsive and natural; the only bad thing about the game so far is the touch-control mode. Separate from the traditional control scheme,

selecting this option presents you with only two difficulty options: easy and very easy. It requires you to focus on the GamePad instead of the TV screen, because you use the stylus to handle all movement and attacks. It's not much different from the very easy automatic difficulty option in the first game, but if you aren't interested in precise combat, why are you playing this series at all?

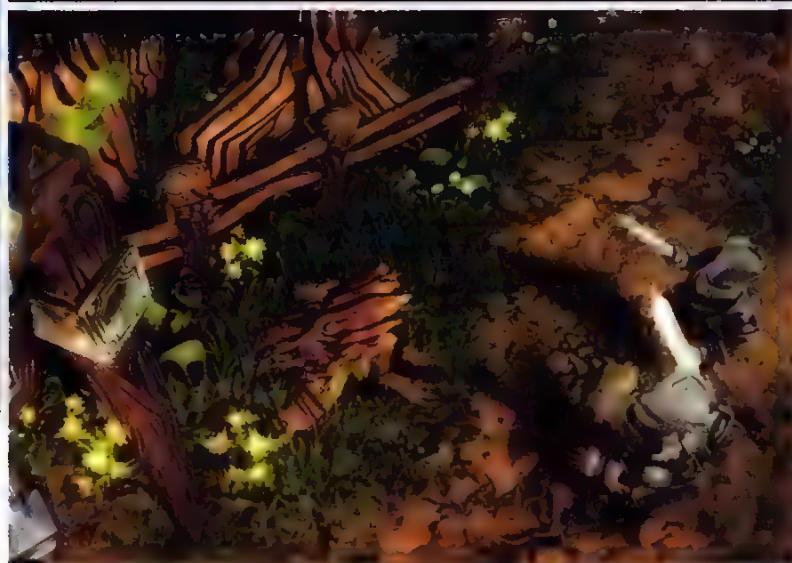
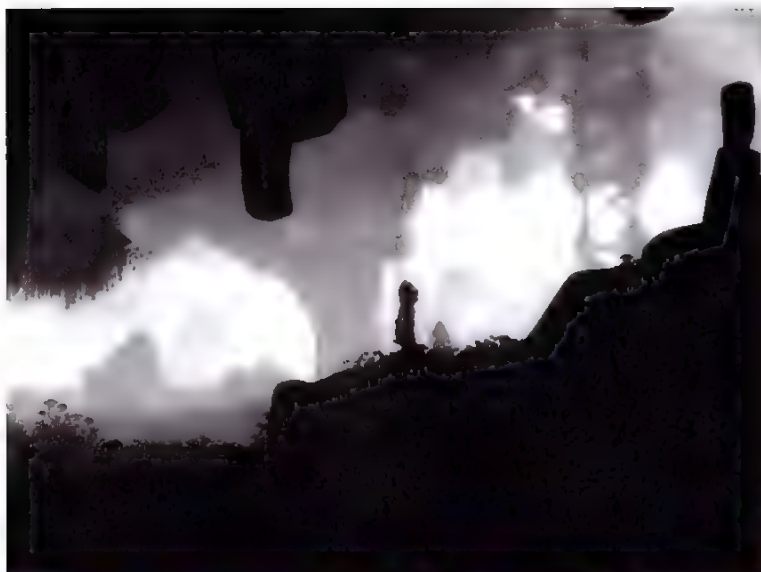
At this stage, Bayonetta 2 feels exactly like it should. It hasn't been blunted or toned down; Nintendo clearly wants to capitalize on the series' hardcore following, and knows that straying too far from the formula would cause problems. We still have some unanswered questions – like how exactly the announced multiplayer mode functions – but playing the game did wonders to assuage any fears that Bayonetta 2 will be anything less than the sequel fans have been hoping for. » Joe Juba



Combat relies on fast and fluid combos, along with carefully timed dodges



Don't expect Bayonetta's suggestive poses and dialogue to be toned down just because this game is on a Nintendo console



Project Spark

Building life with free-to-play creativity

When Microsoft introduced Project Spark during its E3 press conference, we weren't sure where it fit on the game spectrum. Is Project Spark a level designer? Is it creative art software? Is it an action game? After seeing a proper demonstration of the game, it's clear that Project Spark will ultimately become a product of whatever creative players are able to do with it, which is why it's difficult to define it in its current state.

Our presentation begins with a demonstration using a Windows 8 tablet (Project Spark only runs under Microsoft's newest operating system) to create a level. By selecting certain paintbrushes and dragging fingers across the screen, we see a world come together quickly. A large cave with a moat is created with simple dragging. Coastline flora grows from bushes into tall trees as you move inland, and a house rests at the mouth of the cave. You can pinch to zoom in to adjust small details, or zoom out to create wide swaths of shrubbery and trees.

The representative from Microsoft wants his world to be grassy, so he selects the brush and paints grass on the ground. When he paints up

the walls of the cave, Project Spark automatically adjusts to appropriately recreate what the inside of a cave would look like – it doesn't simply apply grass textures to the wall. The resulting world has an art style reminiscent of the Fable games, albeit with a drastic visual upgrade thanks to the Xbox One hardware our demonstration is running on.

After the world is created, it's time to bring in some characters. Birds and orcs are placed in the world, as well as the player character. Every object has its own brain to perform default actions. Birds fly around, orcs attack humans, and rocks sit there doing nothing. Brains can be programmed with simple "when" and "do" commands.

For example, the representative showing the game tells the rock, "when" the player gets near, "do" to follow. Once the command is in place, the rock begins to hop around and follow the player when he comes close. Birds are instructed to explode, the orc is given the brain of a bird, he takes off flapping his arms into the air.

This creation was made completely from scratch, but you can also build a world and objectives from a series of choices. You start

with basic things, like what should this world look like? Desert sand or grassy? What sort of buildings should be here? Choices are made until it's time to drop in the world and explore.

Once the world is established, the player sets down, finds an NPC, accepts a mission, and starts beating up enemies. This portion of the game, choosing your surroundings and objectives, seems to be the closest Project Spark gets to being a traditional game. If you want to play a game with a story and objectives, you have to rely on the output of the game's community.

After demonstrating the creation tools, Microsoft shows us some of the creations that have been made internally using Spark's engine. We see something similar to Fruit Ninja, using the Windows tablet to swipe coins that jump into the air. We are also shown a fully functional piano and a Pilotwings-style game that features a flying orc passing through floating rings.

Project Spark is a strange title. Microsoft says that the game is free to play. The base frame offers basically all of the creation tools, and players can purchase packs that offer more objects and art styles. » Kyle Hilliard

» **Platform**
Xbox One
Xbox 360 • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Microsoft Studios

» **Developer**
Team Dakota

» **Release**
March

46

Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII

Learning how to fight again

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

Style
1-Player Role-Playing

Publisher
Square Enix

Developer
Square Enix

Release
February 11

At the beginning of *Lightning Returns*, the heroine wakes up 500 years after the events of *Final Fantasy XIII-2*.

Lightning learns that the world has changed drastically, and that she needs to adapt if she's going to save it. Players picking up the controller might need to do the same, since combat has been significantly altered for the final chapter in the *Final Fantasy XIII* saga.

The highly praised paradigm system no longer drives the battles in *Lightning Returns*. Instead, Lightning switches between different outfits called schemata, and they determine her abilities in battle. Though I was initially disappointed to see the paradigms go, playing the E3 demo gave me a new sense of hope.

Controlling one character instead of an entire party is different for *Final Fantasy*, but

Lightning is powerful enough to carry things on her own. Her available moves have a range of power depending on how much energy you want to expend, and when you drain one schema's meter, switching to another is even easier and more seamless than swapping paradigms. Unfortunately, you sacrifice variety for this convenience; Lightning can only equip three schemata, though each one can be very different in the abilities it grants, from powerful spells to physical strikes.

I tried out the new system over the course of several battles, and enjoyed the speed and fluidity. It gives you direct control over Lightning, which leads to more involvement than just hitting "auto-battle" in previous titles. The key is to keep the attacks coming; this isn't a turn-based *Final Fantasy* where all of

your attacks need to be carefully planned. I had the most fun when I chained together attacks until a schema's energy meter was empty, then switched to another schema to start a new (and different) series of attacks.

Currently, my main concern about schemata is that they may encourage players to focus more on energy meters than the onscreen action. On the other hand, blocking and dodging play important roles, so players need to keep a close eye on Lightning and her foes in order to respond. How the team at Square Enix balances players' attention is just one element of the combat, and we'll have to wait until the game's release in February to see how all of the other pieces fit together.

— Joe Juba

Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate

A game of Cat and Bat across Gotham's skyline

Platform
Vita • 3DS

Style
1-Player Action

Publisher
Warner Bros.
Interactive

Developer
Armature Studio

Release
October 25

We blew the lid off Batman's portable adventure with our *Batman: Arkham Origins* issue, but we got our hands on the Vita version of the game at E3. The introductory level stars Batman and Catwoman in a rooftop chase across Gotham. The feline burglar has stolen some valuable corporate files, and Batman wants to bring her to justice. The company's private security force enter the pursuit, and suddenly both black-garbed night lurkers are on the lam.

Combat plays identically to its bigger console brother, but on a two-dimensional playing field. Batman delivers swift melee attacks to foes as they fan around him, filling the intangible 2.5D space to add a sense of depth. Visual cues flash above their heads, tipping players off to react with bone-breaking counterattacks. Beating down goons feels great in its simplicity, but we hope Armature adds complexity to encounters with gun-wielding and armored foes.

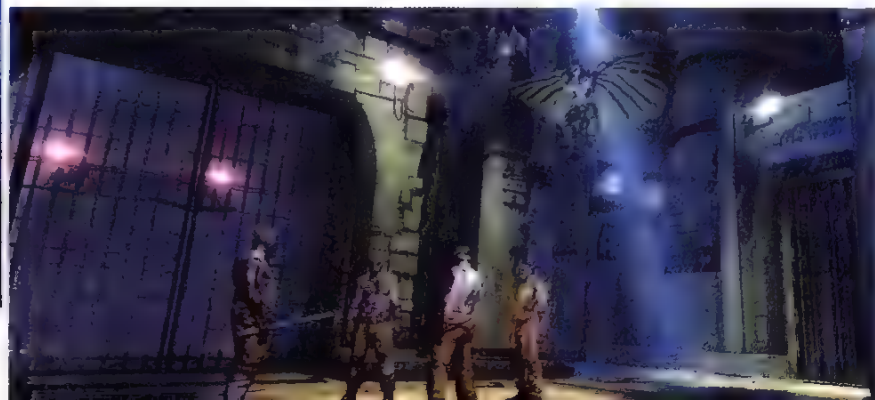
For a game inspired by *Metroid's* exploration, navigating the environment is simple in this early section. Batman relies heavily on his grappling gun to ascend any obstacle higher than his waist. This includes fire escapes or buildings far in the distance. He also uses the grappling tool to hop between gargoyles in the series' stealthy predator sequences, waiting

for guards to wander from the group for a immobilizing drop kick.

The demo concludes with a showdown against Catwoman. Batman dodges her sharpened claws and finally clobbers her in the face enough to lay her out. A police chopper breaks up the brawl, and Batman slinks off into the shadows to leave his disoriented catch to Gotham's finest.

Blackgate does a great job of transposing the core of the console games to handheld, and the visuals are impressive. We didn't get our hands on the 3DS version, but Warner Bros. assures us that its gameplay mirrors the Vita edition. We're eager to see how the game feels once Batman acquires more gadgets and enters the overrun *Blackgate Penitentiary*.

— Tim Turi





48

Wolfenstein: The New Order

Surprising with intense story sequences

Platform PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC **Style** 1-Player Shooter
Publisher Bethesda Softworks **Developer** MachineGames **Release** Holiday

New Order focuses on shooting up Nazis, but what's surprising from E3 is the interaction with your cold-blooded enemies. It feels as if you're really chatting with a polluted mind out to create a divine race.

On a train, the player in Wolfenstein's E3 demo is stopped by an imposing female and her creepy male escort. Speaking German, the woman says you look like the perfect Aryan, but wants to test your

purity. You must choose between sets of objects, with her gun sitting next to them. It begins simply, but soon escalates: pick incorrectly and die. As you finish, she grabs the gun and points it at your face. What choice tipped her off?

But it was a mind game: she wanted to see if you would select the gun. With this tension, MachineGames isn't just focusing on guns for adrenaline.

» Kimberley Wallace



49

Killer is Dead

Killing and tiger chases are all in a day's work

Platform PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 **Style** 1-Player Action **Publisher** Xseed Games
Developer Grasshopper Manufacture **Release** Summer

Suda 51 is back, infusing his offbeat creativity into a tale all about killing. Mondo Zappa is an executioner, murdering not because he's a psychopath but merely to get by. Plenty of blood splatters as Mondo slices through enemies and uses his mechanical arm to add spice to his executions.

Combat isn't a walk in the park, as you chain combos up to execute powerful

attacks. But if you get hit once, your combo level resets. This means mashing buttons can cost you battles, so noting enemy patterns is ideal.

Being an executioner isn't just about the blood; it's also about the unexpected. The demo ends with Mondo on a motorcycle chasing a tiger-mounted yakuza thug, which quickly turns into a boss battle. A tiger chase? What else from Suda 51? » Kimberley Wallace

Lovers in a Dangerous Spacetime

It's like that one scene from *Star Wars*

50



Off to the side of E3's main floor, a collection of independent developers showcases some of the most creative software at the show. Alongside impressive tech demos and interactive novels, a little game called Lovers in a Dangerous Spacetime stands out. This 2D platformer/shoot 'em up hybrid has an art style reminiscent of Sony's charming PixelJunk titles. Two players work together to cooperatively pilot a ship as you move from planet to planet saving good aliens from evil aliens.

If you were to take the iconic scene from *Star Wars* where Luke and Han man the turrets of the Millennium Falcon to take on TIE fighters while shouting down the hallways at one another and make a game out of it, that game would be Lovers in a Dangerous Spacetime.

Ladders and platforms lead to different areas of the ship that control turrets, shields, and navigation. In order to take on the attacking aliens and move to planets in need of saving, two players need to share duties by moving around the ship, jumping on turrets, moving the shield into the right location, grabbing the steering wheel, or firing off a powerful weapon that is locked behind a recharge and can only be used periodically.

At E3, developer Asteroid Base created a build that randomized enemies and planets, but the final game will have levels and specific goals.

I played for a few minutes with artist Jamie Tucker, who also programs for the game, and found myself quickly and comfortably getting into the cooperative groove. Just make sure you have a buddy, because co-op is the only way to save these adorable aliens.

» Kyle Hilliard

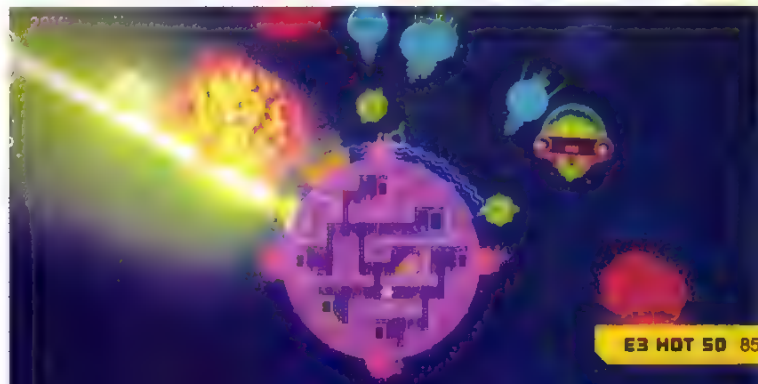
» **Platform**
Wii U

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Asteroid Base

» **Developer**
Asteroid Base

» **Release**
2014





Ys: Memories of Celceta

North American fans never saw any version of Ys IV, but Falcom's Ys: Memories of Celceta is changing that. Xseed Games is publishing this re-imagining of Ys IV built specifically for the PlayStation Vita. Seeing a previously missed chapter in Adol's story is sure to please fans. Throw in the fast and flashy combat, and September 25 can't come soon enough.

Vita

D4

Hidetaka "Swery" Suehiro, the mind behind the bizarre Deadly Premonition, is bringing his next game exclusively to Xbox One. D4 (short for Dark Dreams Don't Die) is an episodic adventure game with a cel-shaded art style. Swery wants you to be able to eat popcorn without getting grease on your controller while enjoying this modern mystery, so it is designed to be played with the Kinect. Access Games has yet to announce a release window.

Xbox One

Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney - Dual Destinies

Six years have passed since a game starred Phoenix Wright, who began the Ace Attorney series. Capcom's Dual Destinies is the franchise's first bout on the 3DS and brings back characters that have come to define it. This time around, Athena Cykes assists Wright by using psychology to read moods to discover conflicting testimonies. You can start your welcoming party for Phoenix Wright and company this fall.

3DS





Mad Max

Avaniche Studios, the developer behind the Just Cause series, revealed it's working on a third-person, open-world action game based on the post-apocalyptic film trilogy starring Mel Gibson. Max drives across a dried-up seabed, hunting down marauders and scavenging parts to soup up his customizable ride. A gearhead henchman named Chum Bucket tags along, fixing up Max's vehicle when it takes a beating. Max also explores enemy bases on foot, using melee combat and cobbled-together firearms to get the job done. Publisher Warner Bros. Interactive says Mad Max will hit the road in 2014.

PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC



Ryse: Son of Rome

Crytek is bringing its Roman centurion combat game to Xbox One as a launch game. Focused on brutal, close-up fighting, Ryse casts players as Marius Titus as he rises through the ranks of the Roman Empire. Battles involve combinations of sword swings, shield deflects, and quick-time event executions, which help to refuel your health. Other gameplay sequences focus on Marius' role as a leader, demanding timed button presses or shouted Kinect commands to take cover from a volley of arrows or charge a fortified siege weapon. Ryse's visuals are impressive, filled with hundreds of soldiers and nearly unparalleled glimpses of destruction; we're holding out for hands-on to make any calls about how the combat flow feels.

by David Brown

Xbox One

Disgaea D2: A Broken World of Genies

Classic Disgaea characters Laharl and Etna are back for a new adventure that occurs after Disgaea: Hour of Darkness. In this entry published by NIS America, expect the trademark quirk, new leveling systems, and more customization. Developer Nippon Ichi Software always finds new ways to make us strive for level 9999. Get ready for the strategy and humor to collide once again this fall.

by Christopher Livingston

PlayStation 3



gameinformer GAME OF THE MONTH

91 The Last of Us

Naughty Dog's award winner is a far cry from the breezy action-movie theatrics of the Uncharted series. The Last of Us is a gritty, disturbing meditation on violence and our capacity to commit horrible acts. It also features one of most fully realized relationships in the history of video games, giving The Last of Us an affecting emotional side to go along with the gripping survival-horror action.

SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	5	Flawed. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	4	Bad. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.	3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.	2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	1	Homework. It's summer, now!

AWARDS

 gameinformer PLATINUM	Awarded to games that score between 9.75 and 10
 gameinformer GOLD	Awarded to games that score between 9 and 9.5
 gameinformer SILVER	Awarded to games that score between 8.5 and 8.75
 gameinformer GAME OF THE MONTH	The award for the most outstanding game in the issue

NCAA Football 14

Not the complete product



7.75

100% (1,460)

» Concept

The series is trying to upgrade itself, but as this generation of consoles comes to a close, it falls short

» Graphics

If there has been an upgrade in this department since last year, I couldn't tell

» Gameplay

The halftime commentary touches on what's happened so far, but sometimes it focuses on the wrong things

» Playability

The debut of the refined Infinity Engine from Madden solves some problems and exhibits others – there are still some odd moments

» Controls/Interface

NCAA Football 13 is more fun from behind the recruitment desk than it is out on the field

» Replay Value

Moderately High

Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (2-Player Online) Publisher EA Sports Developer EA Tiburon Release July 9 ESRB E

Diligent recruiting is the precursor to success on the field. Well, that and a little luck. However, as much effort as NCAA 14 puts into building up its program, it doesn't all translate on game day. The development team worked on additions on both sides of the ball, but I found the on-the-field experience less rewarding than the recruiting portion.

NCAA uses a revamped version of the Infinity Engine from Madden NFL 13, and while some of the post-play pratfalls and more outrageous moments have been cleaned up, you still see inconsistent collision results between players and a lack of smoothness. The new interplay between the ball carrier and his blockers is a step up, but there are times when you are guided around them and others when there's nothing you can do to get around them.

Layer on top AI that exposes itself, and you have a game that is caught in a bad place; it neither fixes the problems from the past nor successfully implements new concepts. For instance, run blocking is better in some ways because the edges are sealed on outside running plays and your blockers take assignments on the second level. The problem is, their AI fails them once they get there, making them unable to pick up blockers in the open field. AI indecision can be seen throughout the game, from players being unaware of opponents around them to not being able to locate the ball while it's in the air.

Despite gameplay that can be rough around

the edges, I like the way the option and read-option flow. The pre-play icon is helpful but not a gimme, and I didn't have problems with the pitches. Similarly, pulling off the new combo moves with the right analog is fun and easy without being overpowering.

I found refuge in the recruiting, where the elimination of the phone call streamlines the process without robbing it of its strategy. I still feel it's missing a personal touch (not that the phone calls were the perfect embodiment of this), such as being able to change a recruit's mind or make promises, but it's a good step forward. I got involved in the horse race with other teams for recruits, and liked tweaking my points from week to week according to how I was doing. The new coach skills, offseason points, and visit scheduling are perfectly integrated into recruiting as well. I prefer to spend my head coach points on recruiting (versus on-the-field effects), and this helps at certain phases of the process. I like how the timing of when you schedule recruits to visit your campus – including with whom and also taking into account how you played that week – adds a wrinkle to recruiting. These additions, along with school's better understanding of your win-loss record in the context of your contract, make the off-the-field portion more dynamic.

Even with these positives, and a better-late-than-never addition of the Ultimate Team mode, NCAA Football 14 is not a game that shows a series playing at its peak as a console generation ends. **Matthew Kato**



Deadpool

Slayed by Marvel's Merc with a mouth

6

PS4 Xbox One

» Concept

Marvel Comics' insane super-mutant breaks the fourth wall in a game that struggles with the majority of its gameplay, yet ends up strangely fascinating for some of its ridiculous content

» Graphics

Although most of the action happens on Genosha, High Moon offers a variety of locations in the region. Character models showcase fluid animations and a nice level of detail

» Gameplay

Nolan North knocks Deadpool's voice out of the park, not only voicing Wade but the two personalities in his head as well. The soundtrack doesn't jump out, and is often blanketed by Deadpool's blabbering

» Playability

All combat avenues lead to repetition or frustration. Melee is easy to grasp, but shallow. The gunplay is often messy and lacking precision

» Entertainment

Deadpool slogs along, dishing out something hilarious or weird every so often. It's not so much for comic fans, but for people who go to YouTube to watch absurd things

» Replay Value

Low

Deadpool knows he's in a video game. After refusing to read the game's script – opting instead to draw pictures of Wolverine and busty women on it – he dives headfirst into the experience High Moon Studios crafted, but he isn't exactly a willing participant. He frequently breaks the fourth wall to communicate with the player, barking complaints about the gameplay, level designs, and mission objectives. When Deadpool loses interest or sees something he doesn't like, his imagination takes control. The game changes to fit his immature, offensive, or twisted whim. In one stage, he replaces famed X-Man Cable with a big-breasted woman who is his biggest fan. Some of his changes draw the ire of High Moon Studios; the game director calls him on the phone to complain about spending too much money on a scene filled with explosions, death, mass destruction, and effects galore.

I wish I had Deadpool's power to complain within the game and cry out for more entertaining experiences. The game High Moon Studios created puts Deadpool's wild persona in the spotlight, letting his mouth spew shocking words and his hands perform even fouler actions. He's every bit the loose cannon he is in Marvel's comic book universe, and favors crude jokes about male genitalia; he talks about the little Deadpool in his pants at an alarming rate. Voice actor Nolan North nails the role of Marvel's odd super-mutant, giving the voices in Deadpool's head distinction, and his main voice captures the grating and annoying tones I always thought he had when I read the comic books.

Spending a significant amount of time with Deadpool is one of the biggest challenges. Sure, he spits out legitimately funny lines occasionally, but he's always talking and complaining and saying ridiculous things, much like an annoying grocery store clerk who wants to talk about every item you are purchasing. I turned the game off twice because I needed a break from Deadpool's mouth. Moments of brilliance are tied to his "gun-fu." Combos seamlessly blend the slicing and dicing of swords with forceful shotgun blasts. Arkham Asylum-like counters can keep the strings going for hundreds of hits. Deadpool's movements are fluid and followed up with buckets of spilled blood. Putting together these impressive strings relies on by-the-numbers button mashing, repeating the same combo commands for all three melee weapon types. The upgrade system is successful in making the weapons and their wielder more powerful, but doesn't offer much in terms of expanding Deadpool's acrobatic arsenal.

The repetition in moves collides unceremoniously with repetition in enemy types. Deadpool

is opposed by waves upon waves of clones. When new enemies are introduced as the game unfolds, many are enhanced versions of the same types, wielding a shield or a new power. Flying enemies are nuisances not just from their ability to rain blasts upon Deadpool when he's engaged in melee, but because of the shoddy targeting and lock-on systems he uses to take them down.

High Moon didn't just craft a brawler; the player can switch to running and gunning at any point, usually to dispatch foes at great distances or in sections where every foe is using some form of firearm. The gunplay is as crude as the melee. Successfully targeting enemies entrenched behind cover is a crapshoot – sometimes it works, sometimes bullets hit an invisible barrier, sometimes the enemy AI freaks out and maneuvers wildly to different positions. I never felt like I mastered the firearm action. Frustration and luck drove almost every trigger squeeze.

The gameplay cocktail High Moon forged falls apart more and more with each passing level. What starts as a game where Deadpool and his hundred-plus hit combos command the battlefield eventually becomes a war of desperation, where button mashing and hasty retreats are commonplace. The final boss battle is maddeningly unfair. The big bad can down Deadpool quickly, even if he has his combos working for him.

When I finished this game, I walked away irate. After a weekend away from it, I found myself chuckling over the crazy things Deadpool said and did. His obsession with Wolverine is funny. The memories I took away from the game were worth the time I put in, even if playing it was a chore. I wouldn't say it falls into the "it's so bad, it's good" camp, but like a cheesy Nic Cage movie, it sometimes hits the right comedic notes, but it just doesn't hit them enough.

» Andrew Reiner



The Last of Us

Naughty Dog's grim masterpiece



gameformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

gameformer
GOLD

Style 1-Player Action (8-Player Online) **Publisher** Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer Naughty Dog **Release** June 14 **ESRB** M

Video games mine post-apocalyptic themes so often that it's easy to numb to the sight of ruined cities. Often, the end of humanity is just a striking backdrop for yet another first-person shooting gallery. As a result, these epic onscreen calamities often feel rote. In *The Last of Us*, Naughty Dog brings the impact of the end of civilization home by narrowing its scope; it doesn't focus on the fate of the planet, but on a pair of survivors who band together to navigate the dangerous and emotional aftermath of a disease that has decimated mankind.

The Last of Us tells the story of Joel, a taciturn smuggler, and Ellie, a brash young girl. They are brought together by chance in the years following a global epidemic that has killed millions and left thousands of others wandering the country as sightless, feral "infected."

This duo's journey starts with a simple transaction. In exchange for a cache of weapons, Joel and his partner, Tess, are tasked with delivering Ellie to a group of revolutionary survivalists who believe she holds the key to a possible cure for the disease. It ends with one of the most complex conclusions I've ever seen in a game. In between, you experience a survival adventure that features both quiet beauty and brutal violence in abundance.

The concept of survival serves as the core of *The Last of Us*. Ammunition and supplies are scarce, and must be scrounged in deserted buildings or created from cast-off materials through a crafting system. You constantly live in fear of both the horrifying infected – the vicious "runners" and twisted "clickers" – and the ragtag human sects that still roam the

barren cityscape.

While most games sell the fantasy of super-human powers, *The Last of Us* constantly reminds you of your vulnerability. Stealth is the key to your survival, as overwhelming odds often encourage you to remain in the shadows before leaping out to perform graceless executions with blunt instruments like shivs. If events escalate into melee or gunplay, you are forced into tense, harried battles that leave you breathless. While the game never lets you feel at ease during combat, the play mechanics – from stealth to the weapons – are solid. I noticed occasional AI lapses and some of the "trial and error" frustration that creeps into any game that relies heavily on stealth, but overall it's an impressive action game that distills the strengths of the survival-horror genre into something that's both deeper and more accessible.

The combat is versatile enough to support a surprisingly competent multiplayer mode, which pits you in four-on-four variations on team deathmatch that emphasize deliberate guile over twitch shooting. It's an enjoyable experience, with a robust progression system, though it feels at odds with the sparse, emotional feel of the single-player game.

As strongly executed as *The Last of Us* is, it isn't for everyone. It's extremely violent; at points when I wondered if the on-screen carnage was overwhelming the fragile humanity of the storytelling.

Though Joel and Ellie's journey is grim, it remains rooted in one of the most poignant, well-drawn relationships I've seen in video games. The light, campy quality of the *Uncharted* series causes some to overlook

Naughty Dog's brilliance at creating realistic, believable dialogue. Using its skill in service of *The Last of Us*'s somber tale, the studio created another high mark for interactive storytelling. As Joel and Ellie's relationship grows, we come to know them as friends, giving each fight to save their lives real weight.

What's left unsaid in this game is just as important as the lines that are spoken. Naughty Dog frequently lets its haunting vision of a deserted countryside speak for itself, effectively and gorgeously conveying the loneliness that comes with living on after the end of the world.

The Last of Us is a deeply felt, shockingly violent game that questions what we're willing to sacrifice and, more disturbingly, what we're willing to do to save the ones we love. The conclusion offers no easy answers. You won't forget it. **— Matt Helgeson**



9.5

PS3

» Concept

Two embattled survivors fight for their lives in the aftermath of civilization

» Graphics

From the detailed ruined cityscape to the emotive, believable faces of the characters, Naughty Dog's graphical chops are unmatched in console gaming

» Sound

The voice actors convey the heavy emotional toll placed on each character, while avoiding any scent of overacting or camp. Gustavo Santolalla's score is understated and haunting. The overall sound design is amazing

» Playability

The tense, brutal stealth combat is challenging and rewarding, requiring quick reflexes, guile, and instinct

» Entertainment

It's not always an easy ride – this game is extremely brutal at points – but the experience will stay with you for a long time

» Replay Value

Moderately High

State of Decay

The undead plague is one problem among many

7

360

» Concept

An open-world zombie game with an emphasis on survival

» Graphics

The visuals aren't pretty, but they're functional...except when they're not, thanks to screen tearing and pop-in

» Sound

Sparse (but appropriate) music accompanies the action, as does unremarkable voice acting

» Playability

Navigation and combat controls are simple and effective. Much of the menu interface, especially when dealing with your home base, is cumbersome

» Entertainment

The tone and atmosphere are the main reasons to play, but the technical and design pillars supporting them are not solid

» Replay Value

Moderately High

Game developers have all sorts of avenues to explore in the aftermath of a zombie outbreak. Left 4 Dead revolves around the teamwork required to beat the odds, The Last of Us is about emotional resonance between survivors, Dead Rising aims for the joy in dismembering and humiliating the undead. State of Decay carves out a new niche in the post-apocalyptic landscape by focusing on the desperation and doom inherent in a zombie-infested world. That bleak theme shines through, despite widespread technical and design issues.

I had high hopes for this XBLA title, because the concept behind it sounds irresistible. State of Decay offers a chance to build your own outpost in an open world, ensuring the survival of your crew while fighting back the advancing undead threat. The story begins by following a man named Marcus, but soon you join a community with no leader, where everybody pulls their weight and contributes to the greater good. This is accomplished by scavenging for resources (which never respawn), upgrading your base, and dealing with other enclaves in the area. The open world serves this structure well, with mountains and small towns connected by an expanse of rural countryside – with plenty of houses and warehouses to dig through.

You don't have a main protagonist, since most characters can die at any time. Death is permanent, so the most mundane supply run can become a tragedy if a passing zombie horde catches you weaponless and low on stamina. This didn't happen to me often, but the loss of characters is powerful if they are among the small group that you are using consistently, since all playable characters have stats that improve as you fight and explore. The leveling system is basic, but it provides an easy way to get invested in the otherwise lifeless (and randomly generated) cast.

The threat of death is just one of the problems you need to balance. Degrading



weapons, broken-down vehicles, influence within the community, and the morale of your comrades need constant attention. All of these things are depleting, so your missions to find food or collect ammunition never feel like you're amassing might; it feels like you're just keeping your head above water – a high compliment for this genre. I've never played a zombie game that so clearly hammered home this hanging-by-a-thread breed of desperation.

What I've described so far is what State of Decay does well, and it would be a great game if those things were all it did. Unfortunately, the bright spots are constantly disrupted by a host of issues, making it practically impossible to experience an uninterrupted stretch of enjoyment.

The most obvious problems are visual. The environmental pop-in is so atrocious that I lost count of the number of times my car came to an unexpected stop because it hit a tree or fence that had not appeared yet. The abundant screen tearing is distracting at best, and the terrible collision results in zombies passing through solid objects – like walls and trucks – with alarming regularity. I also ran into several sound glitches, causing all music and dialogue to cut out completely.

As a fan of technically unimpressive cult hits like Deadly Premonition and Earth Defense 2017, I was hoping I could look past these issues – but I can't do it this time.

They directly interfere with the atmosphere of danger and oppression State of Decay tries to convey, hamstringing its ambition. How am I supposed to care about rescuing a fellow survivor when the zombies I just killed inexplicably phased through a pane of glass? When I'm escorting that same survivor home, how can sneaking around a group of zombies be tense when my AI partner refuses to do stealth? These moments bring down the whole experience, lending a sense of

unpolished cheapness to the cool ideas at the game's core.

My other major gripes deal more with design decisions. The world is full of flesh-eating monsters, and you have a base full of armed and capable companions, but every mission is a solo one. Despite the obvious benefits, you can't decide to team up? In zombie movies, heading off alone is a surefire way to get eaten. Computer-controlled partners can join you briefly, but that depends on the mission.

The quests you undertake are uninspired. Most of them amount to "kill all the zombies in a building." Sometimes you're fighting alongside other people, sometimes you're protecting them, and sometimes you're searching for a particular item. Apart from a handful of dull story missions, none of the tasks feel like they have any sort of authorship. They're just generated and unceremoniously plopped into the world to eat up your time.

Working through the missions wouldn't be so bad if the combat were more entertaining, but the fear of your character dying is the only source of drama. Despite unlocking some new moves as you level up, fighting zombies boils down to a simple shoot-or-smash affair. A single zombie inspires no fear whatsoever, and even a large group of them can be easily overcome if you're well prepared. Not every encounter needs to be a white-knuckle affair, but the monotony of combat and the repetition of missions is enough to wear down any lingering enthusiasm.

Moving between moments of greatness and moments of glaring ineptitude, State of Decay leaves me with mixed feelings. It has a great idea at its core, and I want to give the developers at Undead Labs credit for that. But lots of games begin with great ideas; executing those ideas well and letting the player experience them fully is the challenge. That's where State of Decay falls apart. » Joe Juba



Game & Wario

Wario trades up from micro to mini

Style 1 to 5-Player Party **Publisher** Nintendo
Developer Intelligent Systems **Release** June 23 **ESRB** E

Wario and his weird amalgamation of friends are here to give you a handful of games that do their best to showcase all the assorted capabilities of the Wii U. Game & Wario is different from WarioWare titles in that it doesn't have any new microgames. Instead, it offers a collection of 16 minigames that use the GamePad in interesting ways.

Some of the games are forgettable, some really stand out, but none are downright terrible. The highlights include Wario's rhythm pirate game, which was used to demo the GamePad when the Wii U was first shown. Once you get into the groove of blocking incoming cannons in time with the music, you find yourself performing the highly choreographed actions without realizing it until after the game is over. Kat and Ana have a fun Picross-like puzzle game; you won't be using the addictive logic of Picross, but the structure and pay-off is similar.

The highlight of Game & Wario comes from 9-Volt. You play familiar WarioWare microgames on the GamePad, while keeping an eye on the television for your mother who is

trying to catch you playing games after your bedtime. If you see her coming, you have to hold down both trigger buttons to hide under your sheets. The sound and visual design of the mother sells it; she is absolutely terrifying climbing through your bedroom window and out of your TV with glowing eyes, fangs, and crazy hair. Playing 9-Volt with friends warning me when to hide was the high point of my time with Game & Wario. It's fun, and wouldn't work on any other console. The Wii U may not be the only system that uses two screens, but balancing your focus between them is something that the DS and 3DS can't emulate.

Playing in single-player nets you coins that can be used to unlock more than 200 hilarious and bizarre toys. My favorite unlockable toy, Hitchhiker, asks you to simply write where you want to go on the GamePad, and then you hold up your desired destination as cars drive by. After a few cars pass, you get picked up and taken somewhere, but I refuse to ruin the surprise. These toys are best displayed with

an audience to appreciate their strangeness, but I found myself laughing out loud at some of them even when I was completely alone.

The selection of multiplayer games is disappointingly small, with only five in total. Similar to the single-player game, even though the choices are limited, the offerings are quality and built to be played with a single GamePad. You won't need additional controllers, which fosters inclusion without much investment. A quality version of Pictionary is included, as well as a game where the GamePad player tries to hide in a crowd of NPCs while other players try to pick out who the player character is. My friends and I had fun trying to pick each other out of a line-up, and trying to blend in with a crowd.

Game & Wario is a strange game that doesn't offer a particularly cohesive experience, but that's all part of the charm. It is a humorous and fun title that is perfect for showing off why the Wii U is special. **• Kyle Hilliard**



8

Wii U

» Concept

Wario opts for the more traditional definition of minigame this time around

» Graphics

High-definition suits Wario and friends very well

» Sound

Strange sound design with weird music and computerized voices is appropriate and enjoyable

» Playability

Traditional buttons, the touchscreen, and the GamePad's accelerometer all work together

» Entertainment

Hilarious and random visual gags keep Game & Wario fun, even in its non-gaming moments. It also showcases the Wii U's unique features

» Replay Value

High

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Company of Heroes 2

One step forward, two steps back

8

PC

» Concept

Add realistic line-of-sight and weather effects to the lauded World War II real-time strategy franchise while abandoning the careful balancing that made the original a classic

» Graphics

The action looks great from the normal bird's-eye view. The campaign's cutscenes are shockingly awful by comparison

» Sound

This is the best audio ever done in a strategy game, and it's not close. Lifelike explosion effects are intimidating up close, but clue you into off-screen action when attenuated by distance

» Playability

Baffling, un-remappable key assignments make the already heavy micromanagement burden even worse

» Entertainment

This is a good game despite some flaws, but it doesn't live up to its immaculate pedigree

» Replay Value

Moderately High



Company of Heroes 2 is a good game. If it had been made by an upstart studio trying to make a name for itself, we'd be praising its ambition and presentation. Coming from Relic Entertainment as the follow-up to one of the landmark real-time strategy games in the genre's history, though, it fails to meet expectations. As nice as the new engine technology behind the realistic line-of-sight mechanic is, the terrible campaign and unconscionable multiplayer grind make this a step back from the excellent original.

You could be forgiven for thinking Company of Heroes 2 is an expansion rather than a sequel. With few exceptions, it looks the same, plays the same, and sounds the same. This is exactly the micromanagement-heavy World War II RTS its older brother is, with the unapologetic elevation of small-scale tactics over macro-level strategic decisions. Thanks to the emphasis on cover, flanking, and special unit abilities, the size and composition of two opposing forces matter less than the skill with which they're positioned and commanded.

Higher-level strategy is part of the game, but often the best outcome you can gun for is to guide the battlefield toward ground that favors your army.

On that basic level of immediate gameplay, Company of Heroes 2 works even better than the stellar original. The new line-of-sight mechanic changes the way you approach a map by making buildings, fences, and tree cover break unit vision. This may sound like a small thing, but many units (particularly vehicles) can fire farther than they can see. Controlling watchtowers or other crucial spotting locations makes a huge difference, and in a much more organic way than the traditional RTS method of only certain hard barriers (i.e. elevation changes) breaking line-of-sight.

The other marquee innovation is the Russian winter, where blizzards freeze exposed infantry, and iced-over rivers and ponds form convenient but dangerous pathways for vehicles to travel. These have a much less profound impact on gameplay, affecting the flow of a match on the order of map-based gimmicks rather than endemic changes to the formula. They're both positive changes that increase your tactical options, and sinking an enemy tank into the freezing depths with a well-placed flamethrower or mortar strike is a great feeling, but the effects are ultimately limited.

You have no reason to suffer through the heavy-handed moralizing, ham-fisted storytelling, and dumbed-down scenarios of the campaign. Instead, invest your time in the Theater of War mode's unique challenges, co-op battles, and asymmetrical AI skirmishes. The ostensible metagame of following the progress of the war year-by-year is a thin coat of window dressing, but the gameplay is orders of magnitude better and more creative than the crappy campaign. Unfortunately, the offerings are somewhat limited at launch, with only a handful of scenarios making up the 1941 setting, but

it's an area well-suited to Sega's DLC plans.

Multiplayer is where Company of Heroes 2 performs best, from cooperative comp-stomps to team-versus-team matches and the classic 1v1 deathmatch. The maps offer a great variety of environments, gameplay effects, and sizes. The micro-heavy gameplay has an extremely high skill cap. The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat are as intense as in any well-presented competitive title. The matchmaking services function reasonably well, though their failure to meet the high bar set by StarCraft II is a shame given the game's focus on player skill.

All of these things can be said of the original title's multiplayer as well. The major differences are in the metagame, where a Call of Duty-like progression grind gates such thrilling abilities as "two percent more accuracy for conscripts" behind asinine achievements for killing specific units with certain weapons, or firing off an ability a number of times, or similarly boring requirements. Only two armies are available—Germany and Russia. They have only three commanders apiece, determining which support abilities, like airstrikes, are available to you. You can acquire more commanders as DLC (\$55 worth of DLC is available at launch for this \$60 game), but the spread of options available out of the box is narrow.

Company of Heroes 2 is still a top-shelf RTS with an outstanding presentation and incredible depth. However, the missteps in variety, multiplayer grinding, and pointless campaign are disappointing. The off-putting DLC strategy, which seems nakedly geared to soaking fans for money rather than providing more options to players who choose to invest in the game, is insulting. The original Company of Heroes shares many of the sequel's positive attributes, and offers a lot more variety for a lot less money—even if it's missing the fancy new line-of-sight model and breakable ice. » Adam Biessener





Gunpoint

Jumping through windows and into stealth bliss



Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Tom Francis **Developer** Tom Francis
Release June 3 **ESRB** N/A

8.75

PC

» Concept

Hack, leap, and sneak your way through a series of two-dimensional freelance detective jobs to uncover the truth behind a murder mystery

» Graphics

The pixelated characters and backgrounds offer a clean, simplified, nostalgic, and inviting look

» Sound

Jazz music punctuates the sneaky atmosphere lending credibility to the noir theme

» Playability

Controls are intuitive and easy to grasp, making complex tasks like leaping through windows, tackling guards, and hacking every electronic with a switch as easy as clicking the mouse button and scrolling the mouse wheel a few times

» Entertainment

The core game would be fun even without the engrossing noir theme, interesting narrative, and characters

» Replay Value

Low

Gunpoint is a poor name for such an inventive game. The word is generic and forgettable, but those two adjectives belong nowhere near the actual description of the game. Gunpoint is an innovative 2D stealth title that has you hacking your way through security and sends you flying through glass windows and over buildings to solve a noir murder mystery.

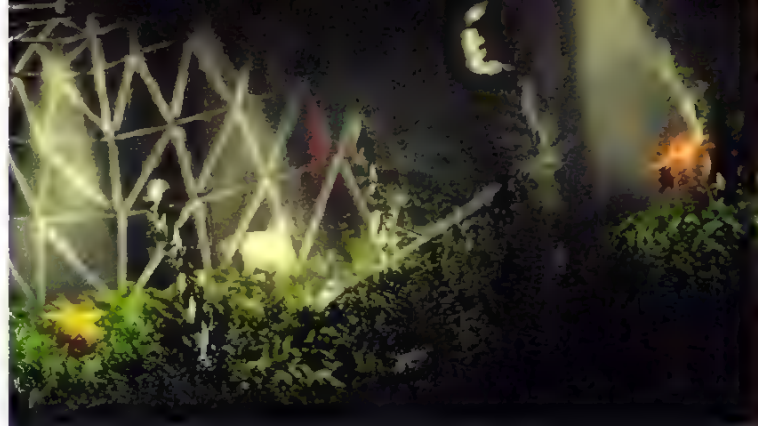
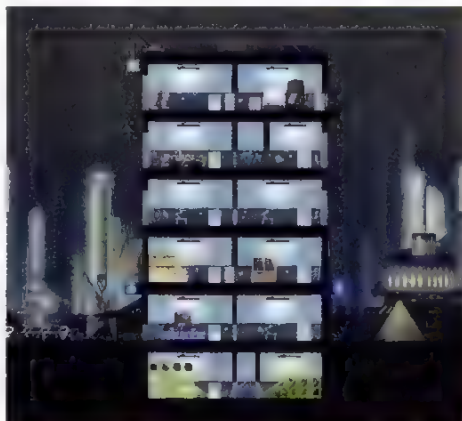
You are freelance detective Richard Conway. You have special pants that allow you to leap incredible distances, and tools that let you bend electronics to your will. You try to solve a murder that occurs in the first moments of the game by taking freelance jobs from clients with similar interests.

Every mission begins with a conversation with your client, and the available responses can make your version of Conway a snarky jerk, a sympathetic vigilante, or an incredulous detective. It's all well-written and often humorous, and the optional responses do a good job of letting the player take the conversation in radically different directions.

The dialogue and story are interesting and establish the characters, but make up a small part of the total game. Sneaking around guards is where the game shines. Conway moves quickly with his jumping capabilities and can stick to ceilings and walls. Moving around the guards and avoiding capture is never frustrating.

Hacking the building infrastructure is fun and always leads to rewarding moments, but it doesn't feel as fluid as general traversal. Hacking is done by connecting things to one another by dragging lines between them. Disconnecting items can be confusing initially, and sometimes you are staring at a hacking grid that looks like a mess of pick-up sticks. Careful planning can prevent this, and by the end, my hacking grids were much cleaner.

Gunpoint is only about three hours long, but it feels like the right length. The story is dense and the dialogue choices are varied, offering incentive to replay the game. The noir setting and jazz soundtrack are easy to get absorbed into as you sneak into shadows, and you'll find reasons to pick the game back up even after you've finished. » **Kyle Hilliard**



The Swapper

Losing your identity has never been more fun



Style 1-Player Puzzle **Publisher** Facepalm Games **Developer** Facepalm Games
Release May 30 **ESRB** N/A

9.25

PC

» Concept

Escape a doomed space station using nothing but a swapper gun and your wits

» Graphics

Found objects and clay models make for one of the most unique 2D visual styles I've seen

» Sound

Sparse, sad piano music adds to the dense atmosphere

» Playability

A wide variety of puzzles can be solved with just a few basic keyboard commands

» Entertainment

Don't let its familiar perspective fool you, as The Swapper's gameplay is entirely unique

» Replay Value

Moderate

As I explored the Indie MegaBooth at PAX East this year, I ran across several titles that impressed me.

Among all of them, one stuck with me more than the rest and left me excited to experience the finished product. Made by small developer Facepalm Games, it's a highly atmospheric, gorgeous title with a variety of mind-bending puzzles. The ride is over quickly, but it's one that will stick with me for quite some time.

The Swapper's sprawling map and 2D perspective may draw comparisons to Metroid early on, but its gameplay proves to be far different than the classic Nintendo franchise. You won't encounter a single enemy during your time with the game, and all of the items and mechanics are fully introduced in the first 10 minutes. What's amazing is how the game manages to present such a wide variety of puzzles with such a limited set of tools.

Almost immediately upon starting the game, you come across a swapper gun that proves critical to each and every puzzle. You can use this novel item to create up to four clones of yourself, and they move and jump with the same keyboard commands as the "true" you. By aiming at a clone and clicking the left mouse button, you can swap places with it. These clones can fall to their death or be crushed by environmental objects, but nothing matters unless the clone you control dies.

Colored lights conspire to make puzzles difficult for your space traveler. Blue light allows swapper rays through, but clones can't be created in it. Conversely, you can create clones in red light but it blocks swapper rays. Pink light restricts both. Puzzles frequently involve creating clones and having them step on switches to shut off the light in a specific way. It may sound basic, but The Swapper's puzzles are anything but.

Like many of the best puzzle games, numerous moments in The Swapper had me confused and staring at the screen for what felt like an eternity. Many had me convinced that I simply didn't have the tools to solve them yet, but I quickly learned that nothing but the swapper gun is needed for any puzzle. Few things in gaming feel as satisfying as conquering a puzzle that had absolutely stumped you for a half-hour, and The Swapper offers this feeling frequently.

Some of my favorite gaming experiences are those that come out of left field and completely blindsides me. I love it when a big-budget, AAA title meets high expectations, but I'm sometimes even more happy when a title I've never heard of comes along and blows me away. It didn't take me long to fall in love with The Swapper, and I was amazed at its ability to continuously surprise and impress me from its intriguing first moments to its fantastic ending. » **Dan Ryckert**



Kingdom Rush: Frontiers

Better in every way

9

» **Concept**

Level up heroes and build towers in a rollicking fantasy adventure

» **Graphics**

Tiny, cute warriors in varied stage locations make for a vibrant and attractive world

» **Sound**

Atmospheric musical tracks offer more variety than last time, and your tower defenders have amusing voices

» **Playability**

Smartly designed touch controls never get in the way, but accurate taps are easier on iPad than iPhone

» **Entertainment**

An improvement in every way over the already excellent predecessor

» **Replay Value**

High



gameformer
GOLD

Style 1-Player Strategy Publisher Ironhide Game Studio Developer Ironhide Game Studio Release June 6 ESRB N/A



The original Kingdom Rush used to stand as my favorite tower-defense game on the market, using cutesy and colorful fantasy visuals to clothe a challenging strategy campaign. The sequel eclipses its predecessor, maintaining systems that are too good to change, but adds a host of new features. It has surprising enemies, entertaining new tower types, a great mix of heroes, a revised progression system, and more compelling level designs. Frontiers is friendly to newcomers – an ideal way to try out the tower-defense genre if you’ve always wondered what all the fuss is about. Returning players will rejoice at all the ways this simple concept still surprises.

Frontiers sends the defenders of Linirea out to new locations across the sea, and developer Ironhide uses the excuse to break free of western fantasy trappings. From desert oases to deep underground dragon lairs, the locales are constantly changing. More importantly, these levels feel more alive and dynamic than before. Many levels include fun interactive features, like the ability to fire cannons from a nearby ship, or saving an unfortunate captive girl from being thrown into a volcano by a ritualistic savage.

The four basic tower types are the same as last time, but each powers up into a brand-new series of top-tier structures, all of which add fun new strategic options. The

new necromancer tower animates nearby enemy corpses, making it a great choice for a choke point. The dwarven artillery mech is another worthwhile addition, marching around to fling explosives where you need them most. We also get some clever homages to other games, like the barracks that can house either assassins or templars. Combined with smart level pathing, each stage demands new patterns for how you choose to hold the line against a host of canny enemies – including everything from invisible lizard men to burrowing sand sharks.

Where heroes previously leveled on their own in each stage, Frontiers introduces a deeper and more customizable level-up process that occurs between stages. It now pays to invest time with a given hero and improve their stats, and when you’re done, to pick another and level up again. The hero roster is varied, but it’s too bad that all of the best choices (including your own personal dragon) require an additional purchase.

Kingdom Rush: Frontiers is highly approachable, but don’t let its humorous comic veneer fool you. Turn up the difficulty, and Ironhide has tuned a remarkably balanced game that juggles punishment and reward in equal measure. Frontiers remains close to form to its predecessor, but recognizing where to make improvements on an already strong formula is an art form all its own. **— Matt Miller**

Animal Crossing: New Leaf

Building a better home for everyone



8.5

3DS

» Concept

Live a day-to-day life in a drama-free, animal-filled town

» Graphics

Sharper than the visuals of City Folk, but it retains the same basic art style

» Sound

Between K.K. Slider's quirky tunes at the club and the relaxing music of the town, the soundtrack is memorable and fitting

» Playability

D-pad shortcuts eliminate some hassle, and bunching similar fruits together saves inventory space

» Entertainment

I was in a good mood every time I played New Leaf, and I'll be spending many more months improving my town

» Replay Value

High

gameformer
SILVER

Style 1-Player Simulation (4-Player Online) Publisher Nintendo Developer Nintendo Release June 9 ESRB E

Nintendo's Animal Crossing is a polarizing series. Little middle ground exists between those who are reeled in by its laid-back charm and those who simply can't their heads around its appeal. New Leaf does nothing to sway those that don't want to spend days, weeks, or months talking to animals and shaking trees, but it retains the series' trademark charm that makes even seemingly mundane tasks worth your time.

Playing this game for 15 or 20 minutes a day is still the way to go, since you don't have enough to do on a daily basis to facilitate long play sessions. On most days, your experience revolves around collecting and selling fruit, hitting rocks with your shovel in an attempt to find the day's magic money-spewing rock, digging up fossils, and chatting up your town's various inhabitants. It's far from a high-octane gaming experience, but I had a smile on my face for most of the time I spent in my town.

None of these elements are new to the series' 3DS debut, but it's still a leisurely good time to go through the motions. Where New Leaf separates itself from its predecessors is your role in the town. From the moment you step off the train, you assume the role of mayor. I enjoyed having some say in my town's structure, as previous games mostly confined you to house customization (which is still very much a part of New Leaf). As someone who typically plays late at night, I loved being able to set a "night owl" ordinance for my town that made stores stay open later. I also had fun raising money for public works projects like a cobblestone bridge, a campsite, and an

additional floor for the museum. Your duties as mayor don't fundamentally change the way you experience the game, but do provide a nice change of pace.

One of my favorite new additions is the integration of 3DS play coins in the economy. Standard items like shovels, fishing rods, and furniture are still bought with the standard currency, but play coins are used to purchase fortune cookies. These cookies frequently contain a "lucky ticket," which can be redeemed for special Nintendo-themed items. I dedicated the main floor of my house to these prizes; it's adorned with the Triforce, a go-kart, spinning red shells, Captain Olimar's ship from Pikmin, and much more. In addition to furniture, I also scored Nintendo clothing such as a Samus helmet, a Pikmin hood, Link's tunic, and Majora's mask.

Even after spending almost 30 hours with the game, I was frequently rewarded with new events. I got excited every time a new character came to town and mentioned that he was considering building a new attraction in my shopping district. A new club or coffee shop doesn't change the game, but it's always nice to add another location or activity to a game that features so many.

Visiting a fellow player's town is fun, though most of the enjoyment still comes from checking out their houses, meeting their neighbors, and planting new fruit trees. I loved texting real-life friends to request they open their town gate so that I could accomplish some of the game's sillier requests; at one point, I traveled to a co-worker's town so that I could collect

signatures on a petition that encouraged my town's residents to wear hats more often. Players can also travel to a minigame-filled island together, but these basic distractions are low on interactivity and fun.

Detractors of the series may dwell on its lack of defined goals and gameplay, but they're missing what makes Animal Crossing great. New Leaf is one of the most pleasant experiences in gaming, free of stressful boss fights, combative multiplayer experiences, or cynicism in any form. Instead, it focuses on clever humor and forming friendships with the residents of your town. Some may find it cheesy or without direction, but I enjoyed this endlessly charming outlier in the current gaming landscape. » Dan Ryckert



PLAYSTATION 3

Aliens: Colonial Marines	4	Apr-13
Anarchy Reigns	7.5	Mar-13
Army of Two: The Devil's Cartel	6.5	Jun-13
BioShock Infinite	10	May-13
Call of Duty: Black Ops II	8.5	Jan-13
Cave, The	7.75	Mar-13
Crysis 3	8.5	Apr-13
Dead Island Riptide	8	Jun-13
Dead Space 3	9.75	Mar-13
Deadly Premonition: Director's Cut	7.75	Jun-13
Devil May Cry	9	Feb-13
Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen	8.5	Jun-13
Family Guy: Back to the Multiverse	4.5	Feb-13
Far Cry 3	9	Jan-13
Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon	8.5	Jun-13
Fuse	7.75	Jul-13
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Guardians of Middle-earth	7.5	Feb-13
Injustice: Gods Among Us	9	Jun-13
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Knytt Underground	7.5	Mar-13
Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	8.25	Aug-12
Lego The Lord of the Rings	8.5	Jan-13
Lollipop Chainsaw	7.5	Aug-12
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Metro: Last Light	8.5	Jul-13
MLB 13: The Show	8.75	May-13
MLB 2K13	4	May-13
Mud - FIM Motocross World Championship	6	Apr-13
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Planets Under Attack	7.25	Feb-13
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Spec Ops: The Line	7.75	Aug-12
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Terraria	8	Jun-13
Test Drive: Ferrari Racing Legends	6.5	Aug-12
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 14	8.5	May-13
Tomb Raider	9.25	Apr-13
Walking Dead Episode 5: No Time Left	8.5	Jan-13
WRC 3 FIA World Rally Championship	7.75	Jun-13

XBOX 360

Aliens: Colonial Marines	4	Apr-13
Anarchy Reigns	7.5	Mar-13
Army of Two: The Devil's Cartel	6.5	Jun-13
BattleBlock Theater	9	Jun-13
BioShock Infinite	10	May-13
Call of Duty: Black Ops II	8.5	Jan-13
Cave, The	7.75	Mar-13
Crysis 3	8.5	Apr-13
Dead Island Riptide	8	Jun-13
Dead Space 3	9.75	Mar-13
Devil May Cry	9	Feb-13
Dollar Dash	6	May-13
Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen	8.5	Jun-13
Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim - Dragonborn, The	8.5	Feb-13
Family Guy: Back to the Multiverse	4.5	Feb-13
Far Cry 3	9	Jan-13
Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon	8.5	Jun-13
Fuse	7.75	Jul-13

Gears of War: Judgment	8.5	May-13
Grid 2	8.25	Jul-13
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Metro: Last Light	8.5	Jul-13
MLB 2K13	4	May-13
Monaco	8.75	Jun-13
Mud - FIM Motocross World Championship	6	Apr-13
NCAA Football 13	8.75	Aug-12
Omerta: City of Gangsters	6	Apr-13
Phantom Breaker: Battle Grounds	8	May-13
Planets Under Attack	7.25	Feb-13
Poker Night 2	6	Jul-13

the score

8.25 CastleStorm

Platform 360 Release May 29 ESRB T

Many of CastleStorm's mechanics have been seen in other games, but Zen Studios blends them all together to create something fresh: a strategy title with a lot of real-time combat elements and a goofy charm. — Ben Reeves

7.75 Project X Zone

Platform 3DS Release June 25 ESRB T

With appearances from more than 200 characters from 27 different Sega, Capcom, and Namco Bandai games, Project X Zone is a cameo-fest, and it always seems to end in all-out war. This is not a bad thing. — Kyle Hilliard

7.75 Warhammer Quest

Platform iOS Release May 30 ESRB N/A

Quest's presentation of Warhammer is both attractive and economical...this is an excellent mobile translation of a tabletop experience — but random design elements in the source material hold it back. — Michael Futter

7.75 Dungeons & Dragons: Chronicles of Mystara

Platform PS3 • 360 • PC Release May 18 (PS3, PC), May 19 (360) ESRB T

The two D&D brawlers (Tower of Doom and Shadow Over Mystara) stand among the best of the brawler genre, and it's fantastic that players new and old can now enjoy enhanced versions of both. The imaginative monster designs, flexible combat system, and unique character classes in this remake defy the games' ages, making for a collection that's a success even before accounting for its enjoyable extras. — Matt Miller

8 New Super Luigi U

Platform Wii U Release June 20 ESRB E

These 80 new courses may exist on the same world map as the original game and largely feature the exact same items and enemies, but tweaks to the time limit and jump physics make this offering worthwhile for Mario fans. Nintendo has always lagged behind when it comes to online offerings, so the quality of New Super Luigi U is reassuring. — Dan Ryckert

7 Muramasa Rebirth

Platform Vita Release June 25 ESRB T

The art and animation are even more gorgeous, but none of the core design problems from the original version have been addressed. The result is a familiar experience that feels both faithful and flawed. — Joe Juba

8.5 Legendary Heroes: Legend of Heroes

Platform PC Release May 22 ESRB N/A

None of Legendary Heroes' rough spots keep it from being an excellent game that I recommend with no reservations. You don't have to be any kind of strategy savant to appreciate what this exceptional release has to offer. — Adam Biessener

7.75 Scurvy Scallywags

Platform iOS Release June 6 ESRB E

The seas are oversaturated with match-three games, but Scurvy Scallywags bobs near the top. Its charming presentation and impressive gameplay depth make it worth a download, even if you are close to being pirated out. — Jeff Cork



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Volume XXIII • Number 8 • Issue 244

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Who Said It?

E3 has come and gone, but each year the convention leaves us with many memorable moments. How well do you know your classic E3 quotables? See if you can match up the quote on the left with the speaker and year on the right.

by Dan Ryckert

1. "So you know cats are interesting. They are kind of like girls. If they come and talk to you it's great. But if you try to talk to them it doesn't always go so well."

2. "RIIIIIIIIDGE RACER!!!"

3. "You ever wonder what the bottom of an avatar's shoe looks like? Well BAM! There it is."

4. "Now you can move your fat body freely."

5. "We're going to go deep and we're going to go hard."

6. "My body is ready."

7. "I'd like to be able to watch this on my television, while hooked into my mobile device, which is being controlled by my tablet device, which is hooked into my oven...all while sitting in the refrigerator."

8. "It will feel like living a lucid dream. The result is a state where you achieve the perfect mind-body equilibrium as you forget your physical surroundings and you become completely immersed in the game itself. This controller becomes an extension of your body, it becomes the gateway to the Zen of gaming."

9. "I'm about kickin' ass, I'm about takin' names."

10. "You attack its weak point for massive damage."

- A. Peter Moore, 2005
- B. Reggie Fils-Aime, 2004
- C. Kudo Tsunoda, 2009
- D. Bill Rich, 2006
- E. Grant Collier, 2007
- F. Reggie Fils-Aime, 2007
- G. Shigeru Miyamoto, 2010
- H. Naoki Maeda, 2010
- I. Trey Parker, 2012
- J. Kaz Hirai, 2006

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 Batman: Arkham Origins
 Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate
 Battlefield 4
 Bayonetta 2
 Beyond: Two Souls
 Call of Duty: Ghosts
 Castlewars: Lords of Shadow 2
 Contrast
 Dark Souls II
 Dead Rising 3
 Destiny
 Disney Infinity
 The Division
 Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze
 Dying Light
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 Fantasia: Music Evolved
 The Evil Within
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 Killer is Dead
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Issue 247 • August 2013

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